

GRANTLEY GRANGE.

GRANTLEY GRANGE:

BENEDICTS AND BACHELORS.

BY

SHELSLEY BEAUCHAMP.

'An early worshipper at Nature's shrine,
I loved her rudest scenes—warrens and heaths,
And yellow commons, and birch-shaded hollows,
And hedgerows bordering unfrequented lanes.'

C. SMITH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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GRANTLEY GRANGE.

CHAPTER I.

JOHN ARCHER OF GRANTLEY GRANGE.

‘WELL, John, old fellow, I see you are still amongst the good-looking ones ! You have a rare brown horse there,’ said Wells, as his friend Archer, who had come swinging along on the hand-gallop from Grantley Grange, drew rein and came up the hollow-way, that was deep down under the terrace-wall, where Wells stood by the hollyhocks.

It was Royston Rookery that he came to, where Wells lived ; an old-fashioned Manor-house in the Teme Valley, that was well situated in the midst of hop-yards

and orchards, half-way down a slope that looked to the river and the fishing-fords. And it belonged to Wells, and it was a good sort of place to live at; for it was a picturesque old house, of irregular height, and roomy; half-timbered and patterned with ovals and circles and cross-bars, and heavy with ivy; and it had some big bay windows and a jutting porch, and clustered chimneys—twisted—and tall vanes. It was under a rookery too, and by a moat; and there was a breadth of lawn and a sweep of shrubbery, and iron gates that led into a tangled garden.

Corn-fields were about it, and meadows below it; and high hills were at the back of it, that were wooded to the top of them. And 'the blow' there was as good as a sea blow, for you had a sweep of seventy miles of country for the looking for it—from the Welsh mountains to the Cotswolds; and there was such a fluttering of pigeons and a cawing

of rooks and a cackling of fowls, and so many other sounds about the buildings, that there seemed to be a good deal of busy life there ; and the neighing of colts and the clatter of hoofs told that the owner of it was a horseman.

And as Archer, having ridden round to the front, jumped off at the porch, that was bright with roses and red autumn berries, Wells came across the lawn and met him.

‘He is a fine-topped horse too, John,’ said he, ‘and a stepper. How are you ? A new one, is he not ; where did you pick him up ?’

‘ May had him for a customer,’ said Archer ; ‘ but as the horse seemed a likely one, and they did not deal, I bought him. How do you like him ?’

‘ His colour is good,’ said Wells.

‘ Yes, it is,’ said Archer ; ‘ a good and lasting one. Look at his mousey flank and tan-touched muzzle. He is a beauty !’

‘He moves well, John.’

‘He has pace too, Harry, and can fence a bit. Throw your leg over him and feel his mouth. How are the colts?’

‘O, flourishing! They are all together now; ride down and see them.’

‘Well, jump up, then, and give me your opinion just what you think of him.’

So Archer turned the horse round, and Harry mounted; and then they went through a gorsed hollow-way down into the meadows to see the colts—five of them—and the brood mares that were with them; and they found them standing together there by some shedding, that was gorsed and wattled, and fronted south, serving for both shade and shelter.

And past the shed was a brook—a trout stream—that came down through the woods to the river; and there were some hurdles on the other side of it, and bushed bars beyond them, and a flight of rails with a gate

in the middle of it, up under the hedgerow at the top, put there for jumping practice, as Wells rode his horses there in the summer to get them clever at their fences, and so make them into money in the hunting season.

‘Well,’ said Wells, as he handled the horse like a workman, ‘I like his move, John, and his action; he does not ride amiss by any means. What shall I put him at?’

‘Just what you please,’ replied Archer. ‘Give him the hurdles, and then try the gorse.’

So, crossing the brook at the roadway, Wells laid hold of him, and rushing him at the hurdles, the horse topped them cleverly; and taking the bars in his stride, jumped them like a greyhound!

Wells then turned him round, and rode him gently down towards the water, caught his head short as he got near it, and sent

him at it. Answering the call, the brown horse cleared it with lengthy bound, and landed splendidly, dropping at once into a steady canter, which, changing to a gallop at a touch, he raced him down to where the brook was wider—an open unbushed place higher up the meadow—when, without swerve or balk, he fled it famously, and dropped into his pace again just like a hunter.

‘A water-jumper, John, and no mistake!’ said Harry, as he came up, patting him. ‘How well he goes! Will Stevens and the gray will have a rival.’

‘I hope so,’ returned Archer; ‘but take him on and put him over a good fence or two; you will not part company, I can assure you.’

‘O, never mind; I see he knows his business. What are you up to?’ said Wells, seeing that his friend was busy with his pencil.

‘Just marking-in the forms of this old oak,’ said Archer, ‘as we are here. I have it on the canvas, with those two mares in shade and the rest in front, full in the sunlight. But those boughs yonder I shall lengthen, to throw some of the youngsters in half-shadow. I think they’ll group the better for it, Harry.’

‘You are very good, John. When shall you finish it?’

‘O, soon,’ said Archer; ‘the first time I can get a working fit.’

‘Thanks,’ Wells said; ‘I shall prize it. I mean to hang it in the dining-room; there is a good light there. You should most certainly have been an artist; you would have been R.A. by now, old fellow!’

‘No doubt,’ said Archer, ‘if R.A. signified just “ruggling at it,” and selling “pot-boilers” for a pound apiece. Paint if you like, Harry, for a bit of pastime—I know you do a little in that way, just now and

then—that's very well ; but as for a living, why, it means starvation.'

'Our stout-built friend, old Johnson,' Wells said, 'looks like starving, does he not?—strong as a horse, and at least six feet in height, and with as nice a place as man need live in.'

'Yes ; but as a rule you will, though, find it true ; unless a man is born with talent in him, or he has the interest of good friends to aid him. Now Johnson is a genius,' Archer said, 'as all acknowledge, and he has good friends too, who can always aid him. However, Harry, as my share chanced to be the "silver spoon," so I can work or play; though were it otherwise, I should be less lazy. But, unfortunately, as you know, my dear fellow, money is "the root of all evil," as our school-copy read when we were juveniles.'

'And the source of any quantity of good,' was the reply. 'If you should have

a surplus,' Wells said, 'hand it over. I know the good of it, and I will chance "the evil."

Ten years ago these men left school together when they were twenty-one—for lads remained there in those days till the nonsense was knocked out of them, and they were fit to face the world—Wells coming home to assist his father at the farm, and Archer going to learn the law in London.

And as Wells was fond of farming, and always put his shoulder to the wheel like a man who meant it, he was able, when his old father died six years later, to take the management of the farm for his mother, who, with her two daughters, continued to live with him.

After a time both sisters married, and settled within a few miles of each other, some distance up the valley. The mother then rented a cottage to be near them; so

his aunt, Mrs. Cooper, her sister, came to keep house for him—he remaining a bachelor.

But Archer, who was living in London, articled to an old uncle in Carey-street, was too fond of the country to take readily to a town life, and he soon tired of it; the sooner, perhaps, because he knew that in all probability he should never be obliged to practise the law as a profession; and the time therefore with him passed drearily, so that he never heard from his friend Wells without longing to be back again in the old country.

But with the greenery of Lincoln's Inn and Gray's Inn, and the musical tinkle of the fountain in the Temple, he did at length manage most days, while summer lasted, to get some slight set-off against the hard high stool, the drudgery of office, and the endless survey of bricks and mortar.

For he had only to evade the vigilance

of Mr. Kewtye—the ‘managing man,’ when his uncle was away—to be in a few minutes over the roar of Fleet-street, and safe in the solitude of the Temple Gardens, where, in his loved surroundings of rustling leaves and falling water, sweeps of greensward and a moving river, with tall trees like the old tall trees ‘at home,’ he, in the quiet of the dear old place, would, with his well-thumbed ‘Tennyson’ for company, forget the details of the law and its belongings.

And when he turned homewards in the evenings, he would go up through the Green Park, and wait for the jingle of the four-in-hands as he loitered in Rotten-row, and watched the riders there, and coveted their horses for a gallop. And he would linger long at the rails there until Royalty came by; that, as a low murmur ran along them and hats were raised, he might catch a glimpse of that sweet pale face with the

kindly smile, that, if it but bent towards him, sent him on his way all the happier under the old trees where the rooks were cawing, while settling in the twilight in their places ; that straightway turned his thoughts to sounds near home—sounds that he liked and used to listen to at Royston Rookery along with Wells, when the evening shadows purpled out and faded under that hill-side many a mile away.

But his best days were Saturdays ; for those were ‘red-letter’ ones, and given to the river or South Kensington—forgetting at the latter all the world amongst the pictures ; and thence for Bayswater across ‘the Gardens,’ over the lengthened shadows of the elms—his pipe his company. He had his picture-windows too, just like a child, and ‘did’ them regularly ; and when his uncle sent him west on business, he would get across to Christie’s and M’Lean’s, and come back wild about some

‘grand old Cox,’ or Hulme, or Gilbert, Cat-termole or Frith.

His route to Carey-street being Covent-garden, he would bargain with the old women at the stalls for homely garden flowers and common ferns. He always had fresh flowers and some birds. A dog he could not keep, or he would have had one; but as he fraternised with Dick, the cat, a fine black fellow who sat purring by him, he soon made up for it, for they became great friends.

His Sundays too were pleasurable; for if not booked for dinner at his uncle’s, he would start betimes for some far village-church; and after service — simple and earnest there like that ‘at home’ — dine at some road-side inn, and then turn out in loving search of heaths, by-lanes, and commons, or wherever else he might find birds or flowers, or anything that seemed to look ‘like home.’

But even with all these set-offs, his office duties were the direst drudgery, and he found himself quite unable to settle down to the daily routine required of him. For being a true lover of nature, and therefore of the country, and endowed with a poetic temperament and great enthusiasm, no wonder that at times—away from his loved woods and hills, and all their greenery—he should so dearly long for his own apple-orchards and the cowslip-meadows, the bluebell-hedgerows and the primrose-copse, and the nightingale-lanes that were hawthorn-hidden, ‘at the old home in Worcestershire.’

And his most joyous of all evenings—those at the Academy—helped this feeling, when in the glad hours he so often spent there—and they were indeed very happy ones—he saw but the pictures, not the people; and longed to be away with Cole in the corn-fields, or with Leader on the

hills, or up amongst the Welsh mountains and with Syer for company.

And autumn came again, his second autumn; and the play of light ceased amongst the leaves, and there was no longer on the sanded walk a moving flicker of red-gold and purple. And dead leaves fell in the fountain, and the old garden-seat in the Temple was littered with them; and blue mists crept along the grass, and damps came up from the river; and Archer perforce became more learned in the law.

Then fogs came on; not the thin white fogs of home, that, though they grayed the hills, yet showed the woods through, but thick ones—dense ones, ten times worse than last year—fogs he could almost eat; that shrouded him in their yellowness, and bumped him badly, hiding the folks he met, and bothering him. And drivers harassed him with shouts, and cabs

worried him with shaves, and boys so maddened him with cries, that he felt, if it continued much longer, he must kick somebody.

For his evening walks home over the soft green turf where the sheep were, and with the rooks and the song-birds for company, had been obliged to be given up—as the days got shorter—and exchanged for a stuffy omnibus at the Turnstile; that, as it was always filled quite full with steaming City men, bound like himself for Bayswater, and grumbling at the weather and the funds, did not mend matters or temper.

But the fogs got thicker, and the horses fell; and passengers got out and walked, and growled at being morning after morning so late at office. And sleet began to drive, and snow to fall; and then the climax came, for dirt and mud and slush were everywhere; that made his thoughts turn

still more to the country, where he knew there would be snow, but white and glittering—ay, white for miles; and the ground crisp, and the ice thick, and not like that in the parks—unsafe and rotten.

The rabbiting and the ratting too would be remembered, round by the orchard hedge-rows and the ricks, with that varmint, Tanner, and that cute old Bobby, the two dogs —Archer's chums; and Jerry would be thought of, the stout cob that he had to ride, and who had carried him so well with the hounds in the holidays, and who would 'lead over' a fence, when the drop on the north side was a frosty one, or the hog-backed stile looked 'nasty.' So it very soon came about that London was spoken of disrespectfully, Carey - street condemned, and the law-books one and all anathematised.

And as time went on, the craving for the country that John Archer had, intensified;

and the hard high stool seemed harder, and dreary days still drearier; when—all at once as it seemed—they ceased to use gas in the office, for the days were longer, and light till ‘leaving time.’

Then shadows fell from houses on the road; for bursts of sunshine came, that filled the Kentish lanes with primroses, and brought the flower-girls, who plagued him constantly with them and violets, just as they seemed to do twelve months ago. That time was bad enough, but he got over it; but now, do what he would, it would bring back to mind each nook in all those dear old lanes ‘at home,’ where all spring wild-flowers grew. He dodged the fern-men every time he saw them, and crossed the street at every flower-girl, and shirked his one pet place of Covent-garden.

But it was all in vain, however, for he got worse, and even passed the black man

without giving, and the old crooning woman who so ‘God blessed’ him. And then, unable to put up with it any longer—for he found punching the boy and scorning his pad furiously did him no manner of good—he plainly told his uncle he would have no more of it ‘there’—law or no law.

So, rushing off to Bayswater, and bidding his artist-friends good-bye, he packed his traps in the morning, and caught the ten train at Paddington; his old chum, Johnson, with whom he lived, seeing ‘the last of him.’ Of course there was a row when he did get home, but he did not mind it; for once at the Grange, he said he should stay there.

And he did stay there; for his father dying soon afterwards—in the following spring, killed by a fall while hunting—he came into possession; when, getting his younger brother to see to the estate, and

remain with his sister—his mother being dead—he joined Johnson and some artists in a sketching tour, that included a six-months' sojourn in Rome.

With a love for 'common objects,' and with an eye for colour, he always seemed to see a beauty in everything; and he would often amuse his more prosaic friends on his return home by his glowing description of scenes and scenery that they had themselves wholly ignored, or had in part passed over—so much did he appreciate that joy of colour, that harmony of form, and that all-pervading presence of the beautiful, that, so thoroughly 'felt' by artists, seems sometimes strange to others.

And so, with his yearning for the country satisfied, he at length settled down to lead the life of a country gentleman; his brother Edward taking the management of the estate, and being well paid for his stewardship; and he, John Archer, spending

his time now at home, now with his acquaintances—a wide circle of hunting and artist friends. In the winter he stayed some time at Hazelwood, where Brandon, one of his tenants, lived—a very pretty place lower down the valley—as it was handier for the hunting of that portion. And in the summer, when he got away for a few weeks to have a run round amongst his old friends, he made Town bearable by devoting the greater portion of his time there to the Academy, and to the studios of the men he knew.

And now that he was just commencing his sixth season with hounds, and had promised his friend Burton of Boscobel to come out in scarlet—to ‘don the pink’—Charlie being, according to his own showing, a shy youth, and in want of some one to bear him company and go shares in ‘lighting up the landscape,’ he, Archer, had ridden up to Wells, who lived on the

Herefordshire side of the river, ten miles distant from the Grange, to see about some hay and oats, and to show him his new horse and to have a gossip; and also to have another look at the mares and colts, before putting in the finishing touches to the picture he was painting.





CHAPTER II.

ROYSTON ROOKERY—THE DAWN OF DAY

‘THERE, then, Harry,’ said Archer, as he finished sketching the oak, and proceeded to touch-in some portions of the shed under it, as Wells sat on the brown horse and watched him ; ‘I think that will do. There is first-rate colour on that old gnarled trunk. Look at those grays,’ said he, ‘and browns ; those tender greens and nice cool neutral tints. I certainly must try if I can get them, and that old thatch. Where those boughs bend I think I will put some pigeons—some white ones. They would come in well above that chestnut colt.’

‘They would,’ said Wells.

‘How well that old tree branches, does it not?’ said Archer. ‘The way those

boughs give off is most artistic; though, were Charlie Burton here, he would see “a tree,”—just that and only that, like the famed primrose on the river’s brim,—and miss all that sweet colour most completely, and all those forms and branchings I have sketched. A melancholy case, I call it, Harry—untutored vision.

‘Now that is where I gain, and where he loses. It is strange too,’ said Archer; ‘for when we have been in town during the season, and have gone together to the Academy, I have several times been quite delighted to see him, when there, positively pleased at some poor transcript of a scene he knew; and yet that same scene, as painted all by Nature, would be passed repeatedly by him—ay, quite unnoticed. So with the multitude! The highest praise, you very often find, is lavished on some painty-looking picture—Nature at second-hand, inferior to her—that fails most ut-

terly in the original to gain one word. Is it not strange ?

‘It is,’ said Wells. ‘I cannot understand it; for though not versed in art, I do see colour.’

‘I often think how much is missed,’ said Archer, ‘through that same want of sight. Now Charlie, I daresay, most days rides round the farm ; and through the lanes and the woods, and along the hills, and so back home by the river ; and yet, as I know, all he sees—or perhaps, for the matter of that, five hundred others—is land, trees, water ! Well, I go, we’ll say, the same round, and I see fine colour, and light and shade in every combination, and changing tints, the same as you might do, and groups and forms too that are picturesque, and make material for artists’ bits—“pictures,” in short, unframed, but nature-painted; the grand originals man never equalled ! Who has the best ride, think you, he or I ?

‘That is just where I gain when I am hunting: where others find but sport, I find enjoyment. I like the sport, but I also love the country; and so,’ said Archer, ‘instead of limiting the pleasure that I have to just the run, my pleasure, hunting days, includes it all—the ride to hounds, and that back home again. What their eyes miss, mine see; that’s just about it. A blessed faculty, and thank God for it!’ Now, then, I am with you, Harry,’ said Archer, as he pocketed the sketch.

‘Well, jump up, then,’ said Wells, ‘and ride him, John. We will go up to the house.’

‘No,’ he replied; ‘you keep your sitting, man; I’ll walk. If you have luck, those colts will make some money.’

‘This brown horse too,’ Wells said; ‘or I am inistaken. He will keep a place, you’ll see, when hunting comes.’

‘He has already done so,’ was the reply, ‘and a good place too.’

‘He has! Where, when?—not since you bought him, John?’

‘Yes, since,’ said Archer; ‘last week a time or two, and twice before. I had him out, too, yesterday, cub-hunting.’

‘So soon?’ said Wells.

‘Most of the grain is in,’ said Archer, ‘where our hounds draw. They are sooner there than we are in the valley.’

‘Well, you are early, John.’

‘I like to be. The first day’s cubbing, Harry, I turn out with hounds, and I make most days with them all through the season.’

‘You get your money’s worth, old boy, I think.’

‘I do; if we have an early autumn and a latish spring, and are not laid by through frost. The two months’ start I get, I would not miss. The woodlands here are fine, but fancy up there in a nice October!’

‘Grand, I should say,’ said Wells, as he rode forward and opened the gate for

Archer. ‘Well, here we are, then, John,’ said he, dismounting. ‘Quiet, Countess, down; don’t you be troublesome. Ross,’ said Wells, ‘put her in a while, and see to this horse. Let him have some chilled water, and make him comfortable.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said the groom, touching his hat as he spoke. ‘Here’s Miles waiting to see you, sir.’

‘Well, my man, what is it?’ said Wells to an old fellow who was standing by the stables, and who had edged away as the horse went in.

‘Ax yur pardin, sur, fur disturbin’ on ye,’ said the fellow, as he pulled his forelock, ‘but a waants a noaate, if a ma be so bould, fur poor Took fur the doctur. The relavin’ offisur dunna come till Toosday, sur, and as ye be Gardin o’ the parish, it ’ood saaive ’em waaitin’ loike.’

‘What is the matter with him?’ said Wells.

‘A dunna neow disakly, sur,’ was the reply, ‘but I apprehends as it’s summut i’ his innards, or his yud. He took bad i’ the harvist, sur, a week agoo—the sun come on him, sur, most onaccountably—and he arn’t been well roight since.’

‘Yes, I heard of it,’ said Wells; ‘but I thought he was better.’

‘I were a-washin’ o’ ma’ ‘ands, sur, at woame, as I’d collied wi’ the tay-kettle—my woife, sur—that be Mary Moiles, as chars fur ye a’ toimes, sur, an’ thank ye fur it; bein’ out a-lazin’, sur, wi’ the wimmen folk i’ the whate-filds—when theer come a tabber at the doore, an’ in strays Hopcutt, the cow-leech, sur, as cured “Blossom,” an’ maade forty on ‘em to the paail agen; bless their pratty ‘arts, they be faamous milkers! So “John,” says I—I calls him John, sur—“you bin a-drinkin’;” an’ I bats him on his yud, playful-loike, wi’ ma hat, ‘cos he’d got a squilt o’ his nose, sur, as showed the drink.

“Don’t be lungeous, Moiles,” says he, “Took’s off his yud.” “Lord bless me!” says I; “John, sit thee doun.” So he sot doun; an’ then he up and teld ma, sur, as how he’d met the poor soul a-tryin’ to get through a gat i’ the hedge in a unkid sort o’ a waay, as though he were moithered loike; an’ a-pearin’ arter his butty, as he said had fettled his horses and sooped ’em oop, and had left him wi’ a bigger load than he could well heft—it were ony some broken bits o’ hetherins though, for his kittle. So says Hopcutt, “Thinkin’,” says he, “to turn his thoughts a bit and cheer him up, poore wretch, I says, The crops ha’ bin koindish-like, Tom”—Tom’s his first naame, sur—“fur theer be a dollup o’ whate about this turn.” “Ay,” says he, “a-pickin’ at his cooat, quaire and daffy-loike, “I conna mend it, the thread fazles so.” “Then odds it,” says Hopcutt. But he couldna maake much on him, sur; so he saw him saafe at

woame—he lives theer anant the church, sur—and then he comed on to ma to get ma see fur the doctur; and so, sur, I comed to you.'

'Well, come into the kitchen,' said Wells, 'and sit you down a bit.'

'Much obleeged, sur, that's sure,' said the fellow. 'A drap o' port winde-and-waater now moight do him a power o' good p'raps, poor wretch! They saay it be moightly strengthnin'!'

'Well, when the doctor thinks it proper for him,' said Wells, 'if you will come up, he shall have some; and anything else that is fit for him.'

'Thank you koindly, sur; it 'ood ba welcome to him.'

'Now, John,' said Wells, 'come in. What will you have, old fellow?'

'O, nothing, thank you, Harry,' said Archer. 'A Worcestershire youth that, evidently,' said he.

'Yes,' replied Wells; 'but with a cross

of Staffordshire in him. His mother was a Dudley woman—"hur coom'd fro' Doodley 'ood soide," as he says—and it makes him fond of the O. Well, now, what will you have? After a good ten-miles' ride I'm sure you must want something, John,' said Wells. 'Come, what is it to be ?'

'Just one drop of barland, then, Harry, for a quencher. It is good, I know, and will not hurt a body.'

'Made with the nut-mill, John, and pure pear-juice. Excuse me just a moment. Here, Mary,' said he, as he made out an order for the doctor, 'just give that note to Miles, and let him have some bread-and-cheese and cider; then draw some perry, and bring us both a crust in.'

'How is your aunt?' said Archer.

'O, thanks, she is tidy-like,' said Wells. 'She is gone up to the common with some things for a youngster who is ill at one of our cottages. There is a good deal of ill-

ness round about here. The doctor, they say, is busy.'

'The wind you always get on these hills,' said Archer, 'ought though, one would think, to blow it clear away.'

'The fall of the leaf, John; I suppose that's it. What have you got this season?'

'Four, and "fit;" the bay and gray that I rode up to April, and this new brown horse that you seem to fancy, and that one at the farm at Hazelwood, that golden bay. I always go there,' Archer said, 'for some time in the season, and stay with my tenant there; you know him—Brandon. How are you off for hay now? Have you any old?'

'Only a rick or two,' said Wells; 'not much to spare. What, are you out then?'

'I have plenty of new left,' was the reply, 'but not much old; and Brandon, too, is short; so I wish you would let me have two tons or so.'

‘When shall you want it?’ said Wells; ‘this week or the next? Now help yourself, John. You have seen to Miles, Mary?’

‘I have, sir,’ said the girl.

‘Thanks, Harry,’ said Archer.

‘O, next week will do, if that is right for you.’

‘Yes, that will suit me very well,’ said Wells; ‘we go for coal this week.’

‘What is it now?’ said Archer.

‘Well, four at market, but three pounds ten to you. Oats?’

‘Yes; I could do with some, if they are not too light. What price?’

‘They are making three-and-six, but three to you. They are bright and full, and weigh well. How many shall I send you?’

‘Say sixty bushels.’

‘How is the perry, John?’

‘O, very good,’ said Archer. ‘What a fine colour it is!’

‘Yes,’ said Wells; ‘it was all picked

fruit. Good healthy drink, John, and beats all your spirits.'

' Spirits? I should think it does, indeed,' said Archer. ' The vilest things a man can ever take to; they make men beasts, and ten times worse than beasts; and they cause more crime and misery than all else. But it is no matter, Harry, what it is, ale, wine, or spirits, a drunken fellow is to me disgusting; to sit and sot until his brains are gone, it's horrid! If men would only quench their thirst and stop, how much this world of ours would be the gainer!'

' It would,' Wells said; ' that's certain, John.'

' Have you much cider fruit, Harry?'

' Well, rather thin,' said Wells; ' but lots of perry-pears and table-fruit.'

' Were you at market Saturday? I did not see you?'

' Yes, I was,' said he; ' but I only just rode in, John, to see some people, and left

directly. Wheat was a trifle better, and so were oats.'

'Have you seen the otter yet?'

'No,' said Harry; 'but we tracked him, under the osier-bed there by the river. His holt is there, I think. I like those otter-hounds, they are so musical.'

'So musical! So melancholy, eh?' said Archer. 'Have you engaged your pickers?'

'Yes, for Tuesday week. I shall have this time, I think, about seventy, with neighbours. The crop is light, so it won't be long about.'

'The better chance for price, old man; they'll fetch the more.'

'They might perhaps, John, as they are bad in Kent. That's good for us.'

'Is your old drier, Nathan Styles, still with you?'

'Yes,' said Wells; 'but I fear for the last time. His asthma kills him. Where were you yesterday?'

‘O, out by Pirton,’ said Archer. ‘There is a strongish litter there; and so we had a merry rattler with the cubs, and killed.’

‘It was a splendid morning for you,’ said Wells.

‘Yes, delightful; and we both enjoyed the ride there immensely. Charlie Burton came in over night to see me on some business, and so he stayed, to make sure of being up in time, and joined us. He has a rare mare this time, Harry, and means to cut us down, the lot of us.’

‘Is Parker back?’ said Wells.

‘No, not yet; he is out with Miller. They mean to pick up Collins on the way. He started off with Johnson and a block, with great ideas of doing wondrous sketches; but he left it for the hammer and the box, and took to plants and stones. Hardy is back, and Lee; they are up in town.’

‘Hammond, I think,’ Wells said, ‘is still there, is he not?’

‘Yes,’ said Archer. ‘I have to write to him soon, by the bye. I promised I would go with him to Richmond, but by mistake I fixed a hunting day, the eighth, and there is a meet then that I would not miss for anything. Dick Gale is with him. They have a place at Brompton, and ride together each day in the park for constitutional. I mean to try persuasion when I do write, touching the pleasure of a day with hounds, to see if they will join some Hunt or other. With means like theirs, they ought to drop a fiver, and mount the pink at once, and go like men. The Row, to my mind, Harry, is, I think, so tame! Just as an exercising ground it is well enough, to show your horses and to show yourself, and to advertise your tailor; but it will not, like fox-hunting, make men manly, that you know, Harry; though many an hour,’ said Archer, ‘have I sat and watched them there, and longed for a gallop, when

mooning home with Carey-street behind me. If that wretched old Kewtye ever found the blotting-pads, he would see his own phiz there some hundred times.'

'Is your uncle all right now?' said Wells.

'O, yes; he is civil enough,' was the reply; 'but he was crusty for two or three years. You see, he did not like me giving him the slip; but the fact is, Harry, I got home-sick, and I was bound to do it; and I am heartily glad that I did leave the law behind me.'

'You would have been too honest for a lawyer, John,' said Wells.

'Don't abuse the profession,' replied Archer, 'or I will charge you six-and-eight-pence for advice. All men must live. Your doctor gets a guinea at a gulp, but your poor lawyer lets you have three nibbles at him for the same!'

'Yes,' said Wells; 'and when he can't

keep you nibbling any longer, he swallows you up bodily, and it's all over with you !'

'Ah, well,' said Archer, 'there are necessary evils in this world, John.'

'Yes, gradational,' was the reply; 'and I know one of the worst,' said Wells.

'Be quiet,' said Archer. 'Why don't you go cubbing?'

'I cannot spare the time, my dear fellow,' said Wells, 'or I should like it well enough. I don't,' said he, 'see much of them till close to Christmas. You like cubbing?'

'I do,' said Archer. 'With but a small "field," and few out, we are quiet, and free from that constant hallooing and noise, and all that aimless galloping that leads to the hounds being maimed and yourself cannoned by some random rider, who, once he is outside a horse, thinks he has hands, and is, of course, a horseman. Before the fences thin you have some chance; but

when daylight breaks through them, to aid the cautious ones, then you have half the tailors in the country with you to override the hounds and make a noise. You often see men out, as you know, Harry, not hold of reins, but hanging to them for their very life, thinking if they have but their feet in the stirrups up to the hilt, after the manner of them, they are safe while leather lasts.'

'You get the freshness of the morning, John. I think myself that is so very jolly! I am always up at four,' said Wells, 'and out at five, and so I know it.'

'You are!' said Archer.

'Yes; at six we breakfast, and at nine have lunch, twelve dinner—just one hour to it. Come, help yourself,' said Wells.

'I wish I could turn out,' said Archer; 'but it is only on hunting mornings that I am up so early; just while the cubbing is about, or the fixtures are distant, and now and then in the summer, when I am

at Hazelwood; but then, as you say, it is indeed very jolly. So fragrant, cool, and still; with scarcely a sound, but the singing of the song-birds or the ripple of a brook: and every bit of turf dew-wet and sparkling. I like to see the game, too, about the fields and the spinnies; the coveys and the pheasants, and the rabbits and the hares, that come out in the white fog that hangs on the meadows to feed with the Herefords. You seem well off for game up here?’

‘Too many rabbits, John; for they play the deuce with that wheat by the wood.’

‘Yes,’ said Archer; ‘I saw, as I rode up, that you have a strip off there as if it were mown.’

‘O, yes, the wretches! Down in the hop-yard hedgerows and the orchards we do keep them under pretty well,’ said Wells; ‘but in the covers we cannot touch them; not, however, till the people at the

Hall have shot there; and by that time the keepers have generally contrived to put them in their pockets. The deuce is in the rabbits, I think, John. I like them in the larder well enough; they are good in any form; but on the land they are awful nuisances. You'll stay, of course,' said Wells, 'and take pot-luck with us?'

'If really pot-luck, John, I will,' said Archer.

'Well, drink your perry then, and let's turn out, and we'll look round the things, and give the dogs a run.'

'That's right,' said Archer; 'I should like to do so. I see you have had some fresh white-faces—some Herefords—since I was here.'

'Yes,' replied Wells, 'and they look kind too. Have you Tanner with you, John, and old Bobby now?'

'Yes,' said Archer, 'and as big a scamp as ever, is old Bobby.'

‘Now, then, you dogs!’ cried Wells. ‘Hi! Tip and Pepper! We will go out this way, John, to stop Countess barking; for though Ross has shut her in the stable, she would hear us, and then the old lady would want to join us; and those dogs are awfully jealous of her because I notice her. Ah, here you are, you rascals! Come along,’ said Wells, as Tip and Pepper came to them, bounding and barking.

So they went off with the dogs, and saw the stock and things, and the loose boxes, and the cart stables, and had a turn about the grounds till dinner.

And after dinner they both went out again, and strolled about the garden and the terrace, and gossiped with the old fellow there who was trimming the cut yews, and who had worked ‘on the place, sir, man and boy, a matter o’ sixty year, come Candlemas,’ and who was still ‘heart-well.’ And then, as Harry would insist on

dusting out the arbour in the hollies—‘just for a bit of a smoke, you know, for company’—they sat there; with the wooded hills before them, and the hop-yards and the orchards below them, that sloped to the meadows in the flat, that were dotted with the cattle, and willowed by the river. And it was very pleasant there; for the light breeze that was blowing brought them the cry of the ringdoves, and the white weir at the mill sent its murmur up to them.

And Tip, who was on the scamp as usual, went off hunting in the shrubbery; but Pepper, who was lazily inclined, lay by the old sun-dial, with his head between his paws, blinking at the pigeons on the lawn, that were pluming their snowy feathers, and cooing there by the ruined fountain, that made such a pleasant splashing sound, as its jet, still there, fell on the lilies in the basin. And the lazy old dog would

keep dropping asleep and dreaming, to wake and whimper, and so startle the pigeons, and make them fly up to the ivied barn, to flutter down again when he settled, and strut about him.

And Wells and Archer chatted together there for some time about horses and hops, and stock and crops and markets, and then of hounds and hunting, and the early fixtures ; when, ‘John,’ said Harry, ‘how about the run? You said you would tell me all about it after dinner, and what you and Charlie did amongst the cubs. Pirton I think you met at, did you not?’

‘Yes,’ said Archer; ‘Pirton Spinnies. They are beyond the church, near the farm where you bought that bay cob. They are snug and quiet, with famous lying, and with lots of feg ; and being down in a dip, are just the very places for a good litter.’

‘You must have started early,’ said Wells, ‘for that quarter?’

‘We did,’ said Archer; ‘soon after four, for the fixture was at six.’

‘I wish I had been with you.’

‘I wish you had,’ said Archer. ‘Friend Charlie was delighted with the ride.’

‘A novelty to him, John, to see the day break.’

‘Yes, it was, indeed; but he thoroughly enjoyed it, though he did rub his eyes when he started.

‘I think,’ said Archer, ‘those early morning skies are beautiful, when they loose daylight in! I like to see them as they flash the daffodil, that ripples through the gray and breaks it up; and see the forms it makes, that blend together and then shape to clouds—rose, dun, and violet—and each one underlit!

‘We watched it as we rode, trembling along the sky from east to west—you, earliest of birds, must see it frequently—and we saw the blue come in, and noticed

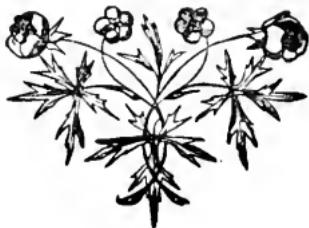
how it crept along and widened, and scattered all the clouds to little bits, gold-edged ; that, as broad daylight came, vanished to vapour in a sky all blue ! I only wish that I could see it oftener ; I envy all who can get up so early.

‘ We reached the spinnies as the clock struck six,’ said Archer, ‘ and found the pack there, with George and Dick the whips, and Will Warne the huntsman, and the Red-Coat Runner, who was by Will’s white horse, playing with the hounds. And we were soon joined by a score or so of others, well mounted, but in the rough, as we were also ; and then the Master came.’

‘ Kerrison ?’ said Wells.

‘ Yes, Sir Charles,’ said Archer ; ‘ he has been Master, as you know, for very many years, and has always been popular. “Good-morning, gentlemen,” he said, as he rode up with some friends, and lifted his hat to the lot of us, and looking as young as ever,

though he must be getting on a bit. "I am glad to meet you. We are just a handful I see, and so right in number for a good rattling spirt along the meadows. Now, Warne," said he, "let's put the youngsters in; it is six o'clock, time's up! To give the cubs a chance, we will draw 'down wind.' "





CHAPTER III.

OUT WITH THE CUBS, AND A KISS IN THE HOP-YARD.

‘ You found, of course,’ said Wells. ‘ I know the fixture ; it is safe for a litter, and a certain find.’

‘ We did,’ was the reply ; ‘ for before the hounds had been ten minutes in, leaves rustled and sticks cracked, and then there was music ! And as the old hounds,’ said Archer, ‘ dashed merrily along through the fern and bracken, the youngsters faced the briers pluckily, not shirking them as they did at first, when it was all new to them and their hides were tender, but tearing away through them like good ones, and as wild as wolves.’

‘I suppose they are good hounds, are they not?’ said Wells. ‘They had some of them here “at walk” at Nelson’s farm, and also at the Hollies, and they seemed good hounds to me; I often saw them.’

‘I think they will make good hounds,’ said Archer. ‘Old Charlie was delighted with them when with me yesterday. “What a lot of resolute young beggars these hounds are!” said he. “The way they searched that underwood, and plunged into the thickest of the cover, was splendid. Scratches won’t cow them, I can see; they’re game, and rare good plucked ones, and they will soon face gorse.”

‘We found that the one we had up was the vixen; so the hounds were stopped,’ said Archer, ‘and turned again to cover, when very soon the whole place seemed alive, for we had the lot up—every cub a-foot. But as one of them chanced to meet a hound, and stopped to wonder at the strange en-

counter, he got quite bewildered, and the hounds were on to him; for others seeing him, they settled to him, and so he bolted.

‘Charlie and I,’ said Archer, ‘were waiting in the meadow keeping a good look-out, when, as we heard the hounds running in the cover, we saw the cub come scrambling down the bank through the briars, and three hounds after him, almost at his brush, that neither of us had much time to move, as the rest of the pack came leaping through, close to them. Luckily, however, our horses were quiet, and they behaved well, though the hounds were tumbling against their legs and giving tongue lustily. We did not stir, of course,’ said he, ‘until they were all clear; but then we made play up the meadows, where the pace was so sharp that we almost feared they would “chop” him. The cub, though, held his own for several fields, when, thinking perhaps that he would be safer with his mother, he turned,’ said Archer, ‘to try to get back into the cover,

but meeting the hounds, it was soon all over with him ; his days were ended !'

' Poor little beast !' said Wells.

' I don't myself like killing cubs,' said Archer ; ' but what are you to do ? You cannot help it. A fierce old dog-fox always dies so game, that with the excitement pity is stamped out ; but those soft, woolly, flocky little dogs have all such winsome ways, and look so sharp with their bright beady eyes when they are at play—I have often watched them—that if they could be spared, I should be glad. However, as I know, Harry, that can never be, I will not get sentimental on the matter ; for though it is not like your "fixture" hunting, still what we get is good, and I would not miss it. It also is, as you know, very useful in making horses clever at their fences, and quietly behaved, too, with the hounds. Besides,' said he, ' there is so much to see in our fine woodland country in the autumn,

when every hedgerow tree is flushed with colour, that sympathy with cubs is not obtrusive; yet thinking of them makes you pity them, if only that they are young.'

' You see,' said Harry, pointing to the woods, ' that yew-tree yonder, just up the gully, where the wood dips down? Well, in the sandstone rock there, there's a litter. I went up there the other night with Mann, the keeper, who showed them to me. But the vixen winded us, though we were hidden; and so she turned and laid her rabbit down under a bush, and slinked away into the brush and stayed there, and would not show again. The cubs, though, came out as the moon rose, and played and rolled about, ay, just like kittens.

' They are very pretty,' said Wells, ' and were their scent less strong, they would do for pets, for ladies' muffs.'

' They are jolly little things, certainly,' said Archer. ' Well, after we had killed the

cub, we went back again to the cover, to try if we could bolt another; and they were soon on the move again. But they would not bolt, and we had nothing but up and down work and round and round, the pack dividing. At last, by dodging, Will got the hounds to settle to the one he thought was the strongest of the lot, and they soon forced him out through the fence at the upper end and along the banks, he holding them in check, so as to give the cub a start.

‘We soon,’ said Archer, ‘found that he was a game one, for he went straight and well, and things looked promising, and as if we should have a good gallop by the river. But after we had raced him for five or six fields, that had each of them tidy fences, and at one of which,’ said Archer, ‘your friend Simkins got a fall, he turned for a dingle that was handy; but failing to hang there, he made off up the country, as if he knew there were some big woods beyond it;

and then some of the fellows began larking.'

' You get pretty well of that, no doubt,' said Wells.

' Yes,' replied Archer, ' always in the cubbing, and rather too much of it. Tom Harber was one of them. He backed his horse against the miller's—Ben Branson, who was out—"to fairly follow hounds, and to take all fences, no gates allowed ;" Charlie and I to see that neither shirked. So putting the steam on,' said he, ' away they went, as if they had tops and cords on in the season.

' The betting at first,' said Archer, ' was even by the "field," then five to three was laid against the miller, whose horse, had up from grass, that good red roan, broke into heats, and so brushed half his fences. Tom picked his up at every place he came to—he is a neatish fencer, as you know—and chaffed the miller, who quite good-humouredly

joined in the laugh we had, although it was against him, and still kept on. A check, though it was but a short one, put matters right, however, for the roan went better when the hounds hit off again.

‘We were now getting to some stiff enclosures,’ continued Archer, ‘and so we betted on the pair for the first fall. The miller tried it, but his horse recovered; when Tom, who fancied he could cut him down and stop him, spurred his black mare—that blood, hot-tempered one that broke the hurdles.’

‘I know,’ said Wells; ‘a wild one.’

‘Well, that soon made her fractious; so, getting the bit in her teeth, she took her fences racing, when, catching some stiff rails, he got a cropper; the miller clearing them as Tom lay under.

“First fall to Harber!” said Ben, as he went on laughing, and raced for the next fence, and went over it.

“Look out, old fellow,” said Tom, as he picked himself up and mounted, “I shall be bound to catch you yet!”’

‘What fun!’ said Wells. ‘I wish I had been with you.’

‘Then they both went at it as if they meant it ; Charlie and I,’ said Archer, ‘riding all the while well alongside them to keep score, the cub still in wind and the hounds going fairly, when the miller fell a whacker!

“A fall in flour!” cried Tom ; and then he fell too.

“And better times, my boys ; a fall in meat!” cried Ben, as he mounted again and rode off like a good one, before the grazier could get in the saddle again, and shouted at the next fence, “State of market : hops, gentlemen, you see, are somewhat lower,” as Pearce, the buyer, who was chaffing Ben, caught some big sticks and purled.’

‘He would leave his mark,’ said Wells ;

‘for he is no feather-weight. Just stop a minute, John; who is that man down the bank yonder? He is on a bay there, looking at the hops. O, I see; it is the new tenant up the hill. Ah, you may look, my man, but they beat yours. Yes, John.’

‘Well, while all this larking was going on,’ said Archer, ‘the youngsters took their share with the old ones, and went well, and hunted fairly every yard of ground. As the cub was a strong one, and gave us a good gallop, we each thought we were in for a smart run; but all at once we heard a noise of singing and laughing. So Charlie cried,

“Push on, miller, and stick to him, grasier; and ware hops, mind, when we get in the rows! We are near a hop-yard, for I hear the pickers. It is all but over; for if he ventures there his fate is sealed, they will soon settle him!”’

‘It was early, too, for picking,’ said

Harry. ‘They have none of them commenced this side the water.’

‘I thought so too ; but it was true, sure enough,’ said Archer, ‘for as we turned round a corner, there they were, down in a hop-yard, and all singing merrily. They looked so picturesque,’ said he, ‘grouped or scattered about as they were, and making bright bits of colour all about there ; with wreaths of blue smoke floating to the woods from their fires. It was quite a bit for Johnson.’

‘The right one, too, to render it,’ said Harry. ‘He painted some of our lot once,’ said he, ‘and did them famously ; so true and natural. Hop scenes are too often but fancy pictures, as you know, John ; and all those unstudied attitudes of rustic beauty that you meet with altogether ignored for show and prettiness and posings ; elegant maybe,’ said he, ‘but wrong, as they of course clash with all surroundings, and de-

stroy the very character of such scenes. And you see the same thing in gleaning and haymaking pictures; how clean and neatly dressed, and what a town look they make the figures have! It is wrong of course.'

'Yes,' Archer said, 'and comes of studio-painting, and working more from models than from nature. I hold with models, though, for single figures, and also to correct form; and they are often necessary to work in detail in your out-door studies; but where there are many figures, as in hay and harvest fields, attitudes and groupings, to be truthful, must be marked-in carefully on the spot, and with all those lights and shadows well made out that show the time of day and where the sun is. A practised hand, perhaps, may mask a studio bit by piecing it together cleverly; but nine times out of ten,' said Archer, 'you may tell it, either by fancy work or some queer

fancy sky badly thought out, and at variance with the shadows.'

'You very often see it on the walls,' said Wells, 'in lots of galleries.'

'You do,' said Archer, 'and, much to my surprise, it passes muster.'

'Well, to return to the hounds, Harry,' resumed Archer. 'They had crossed a lane as we caught sight of the pickers, and were now slanting over a grass patch, and making for the hop-yard; and they all went right into it, as we watched them. And then "from scent to view" was but the work of a moment; for the people shouted and commenced running, up and across and in and out the alleys, as if they wanted to catch the cub themselves. So poor pug was soon settled—they mobbed him! For as we cantered up along the adland an old hound fastened, and the youngsters had him; the miller tearing in with waving hat, and cry of "Kill to me, you two—one fall to spare!"'

as Harber showed at the bottom of the rows. Of course the place was all alive by then; for each had so much to say, and all were talking.'

'A pity too,' said Harry, 'that they "chopped" him.

'Here's Benson's man,' said he. 'What does he want, I wonder? Excuse me, John.

'His master has some beans to sell,' said Wells, returning. 'He says, will I ride round and see them, they are worth the money. So I will go up to-morrow, John. If they suit, it will save me going to town; and if not, I will meet you at the Fox on Saturday. Do you know whose hops those were where you killed the cub?'

'The name was Mowbray,' said Archer.

'Ah, Mowbray of the Green,' replied Wells.

'He seems, I think, a very decent fellow; he made us all go up,' said Archer, 'and did us well.'

‘He has some early sorts,’ Wells said, ‘that ripen quickly. I heard that he would pick a week before us. How did they look?’

‘O, fairish to my thinking. I asked the man who cut them; he said, “Well.” But were Charlie here, he could tell you more about them; they cribbed him!’

‘They did? Well, that is good!’ said Harry, laughing; ‘I am very glad they had him. How did they manage it?’

‘Well, in this way,’ said Archer: ‘when he dismounted he gave a man his mare to move about, and then he strolled amongst the pickers for a chat, while the hounds rested, as all the people went to work again as soon as the scurry was over.’

‘Women or girls?’ said Wells.

‘A few of them were women, but the greater part of them,’ said Archer, ‘were tall, well-grown, saucy-looking girls, with sunburnt faces, who swarmed round him as he got amongst them, and cried,

“Come, I say, you sir, just you pay your footing; it’s a rule, you know; so if you don’t hand out, we’ll all soon crib you!”

“What’s that?” said Charlie. “What do you mean by that?” making believe he did not know a bit.

“Why, kiss and tumble you, and that right well, and soon, the lot of us; as you will see, unless you tip us just to drink your health. You will now, won’t you? Do, there’s a darling!” said one girl coaxingly, with a meaning look, that seemed to us to be brimful of mischief.’

‘I missed that lot,’ said Wells.

‘You did,’ said Archer; ‘but Charlie boy, who rather likes a frolic, said, “No, I won’t; I would sooner stand the kissing;” thinking she did not mean it, though she said it. “So now then, girls, come on! Come, who’s the first?”’

‘That’s just like him!’ said Wells.

““Why, you,” she cried, and gave his

lips a smacker! “So in you go, young man, head over heels. Now kiss him, girls,” said she, “as if you loved him. You don’t get such a young man every day!” And with a jerk she fairly tipped him over, down into a crib that was half filled with hops, and close beside them.’

‘Poor Charlie!’ said Wells.

‘So there they held him,’ said Archer, ‘laughing as he fought, till each—near fifty of them—had bent down and kissed him! And that so furiously, they stopped his breath.’

‘That’s good!’ said Wells.

‘When just as he began to beg for mercy, the farmer came across, with whip in hand, and cried, “Just stop that, will you, you young hussies? Confound your bodies! How often have I said I won’t allow it, you fast young pieces? Just help him out at once, and make him tidy, or else I’ll stop your apples when you

go, you cheeky varmints!" So they very soon had him out,' said Archer.

'What,' said Wells, 'did Charlie say to it?'

'O, only laughed,' said Archer; 'though the hops had stained him finely.'

"A rule, they say," said he. "O, never mind them. Here, lassies, is some silver for you. Now be off," said Charlie, as he wiped his coat with his handkerchief, and pitched a couple of half-crowns to them; that brought several of them on their knees, all of a heap together, upsetting a crib as they scrambled for it.

"And here's, then, one for me, you nice young man. I likes the look o' you; you're nice, you are!" cried one great girl, who kissed him, and then scampered.'

'What fun!' said Harry. 'How did you come off?'

'Why, took the hint,' said Archer, 'and tipped them, and so I escaped. We chaffed

old Charlie pretty well about it; but he vowed we were only jealous of his luck in getting such a lot of kisses without the asking.

‘As all were now on the move up to the house, with Will and the whips and the farmer, and the rest of them, we followed,’ said Archer, ‘with Sir Charles, who had stayed along with his friends to see the fun and to treat the pickers.

“You have a lively lot there, Mowbray,” said he, as we overtook them. “I thought our friend, Mr. Burton here, would have been kissed to death. I do not think they are troubled with much shyness.”

“O, not a bit of it, Sir Charles,” said the farmer; “they’re brazen madams, and quite above my hands, I can assure you. All my work, that it is, to stop ‘em prigging, although we give ‘em as many apples as they can carry when they go home again after picking’s over; besides some of the

rosiest from the heaps to thread, and hang in long loops, three deep, round their necks, confound 'em! They go back through the towns, Sir Charles," said he, "rigged out that way; with bundles on their heads as full as they can be, and with sprays of hops about 'em, picked from the hedges, or else begged from us, or, just as likely, perhaps taken without With your leave or By your leave; for they're awful imps, are hop girls; awful!"'

'We give ours hops,' said Wells, 'to stop their stealing.'

'And a good plan too,' said Archer. 'Sir Charles then asked, "Where do you get them from, Mowbray? They are healthy-looking girls, and bright and clean."

"Most," said the farmer, "from the Black Country. A woman finds 'em, and brings 'em here from the pit-banks in a boat, at least halfway, and then they ride or trudge it; or, if our team's at play, we

send to ‘the Port,’ ” said he, “ to meet ‘em. They’re black enough at home amongst the cinders, but here they’re clean, I will say that for ‘em, although they’re roughish.

“ You’d see ‘em, if you stayed till night, Sir Charles—till seven o’clock—round that long water-trough,” he said, “ as wild as colts, and quite as full of anties; scrubbing away for life, with all their back-hair down and half undressed, or flinging water, or squatting on the steps there by Nep’s kennel—we pen him up, or else he’d nip ‘em tight!—to comb their long locks out a bit, and brush ‘em tidy; for let who will be by, they’re not a bashful lot, that’s very certain!

“ They all sleep there,” said Mowbray, “ in the barn; their noise is awful. I often have to crack the whip at night, and sing out, ‘ I’m a coming! ’ Then they stop. The only quiet ones we have,” he said, “ are neighbours; but they go home.”

‘Something like my lot, John,’ said Wells. ‘Bad is the best. I hope though this time they’ll be rather better.’

“Now here we are, gentlemen,” said Mowbray, as we reached the house,’ continued Archer, “Come in, please! We have some decent cider, and some perry. Have what you like; you’re welcome. Come here,” he said, “some of you men, and move the horses round, and keep ‘em clear of hounds, but don’t you ride ‘em. Get some chilled water and some gruel, Tom, and let ‘em have it; and, Dick, wipe ‘em down a bit, and comb their manes out. Now, gentlemen!”

“Thanks, Mowbray,” said Sir Charles, “you’re very good; but we must not trespass too much on your kindness.”

“All right, Sir Charles,” said he, “we’ll have ‘em seen to, they’ll be the fresher; for it’s a good long way now till you reach the kennels. There’s water handy if the hounds will lap it.”

‘So we went into the house,’ said Archer; ‘a large and roomy one, and with a kitchen well hung with hams and sides of bacon; Will and the whips remaining with the hounds, and having their lunch outside on the pitching. The wife, it appeared, was busy in the dairy, butter-making; but the daughters, who seemed to be three nice homely girls, soon made themselves useful, and got a spread for us. A round of beef and a ham, and some nice brown-bread and cheese, and a capital meat-pie, and some chawl, all in a plain way, and so we enjoyed it, as although it was at that time but eight o’clock, we had breakfast at four, and the fresh air since then had given us both an appetite.’

‘I think you fell on your feet at the right place,’ said Wells.

‘I think we did,’ said Archer.



CHAPTER IV.

A QUEER CUSTOMER—MORNING IN THE VALLEY.

‘YATES,’ said Wells, calling from the arbour to the old man who was clipping, ‘don’t cut those yews too close; and see that all the loppings are burnt before you go home, or they will be pitched aside somewhere, and settle my cows. Shy a stone at that rascal Tip, will you? he will play the deuce with those hollyhocks. Come here, you sinner,’ cried Wells, calling to him, ‘and settle yourself down a bit by old Pepper.’

But there was no come back in that dog; for he left the lawn and treed the cat immediately, and made vigorous attempts to get up the ivy and have her in the

branches. ‘What a varmint it is!’ said Wells; ‘he has been coached out of those hollyhocks before to-day. Confound the dog, I don’t want him to spoil them!’

‘No,’ said Archer, ‘they make a nice line of colour along the terrace, and you can see them above the wall as you come up the bank; they come in well between those two wonderful peacocks.’

‘Ah,’ said Wells, ‘those are Yates’s handiwork; he is a dab hand at that sort of thing. He wants sadly to get to work at the yews round the moat; he says, “They’d look mighty fine, master, cushioned and bolstered;” but I tell him, John, they are out of bounds, and look best there as they are.’

‘So they do, Harry,’ said Archer, ‘though here they are right enough and in keeping with the timbered work and the chimneys. Well,’ he continued, ‘as I was saying, we had a good lunch there, and after we had

done ample justice to it, we thanked the ladies and our worthy host for their kindness, and mounted to go home, as the pack had started, when a rough-looking fellow in a velveteen jacket, and with a whip in his hand, came up by the fold-yard to the green in the front, and touched his hat to the farmer.

“It’s o’ no manner o’ use, maister,” said he, going straight into the middle of his grievance; “I mun gie him up; for a bigger brute I never had to do with. He’s snapt the martingale and comed roight over, and thray times I’ve slipped him. Try some one else’s neck—I dunna moind it; for though he be a good horse, he’s a nipper, and never, I think, can be broke o’ rearin’.”

“Is that all that’s the matter with him?” said Charlie.

“That be all, sir,” replied the fellow; “and enough too, as I reckon. But p’raps you fancy, young sir,” said he to Charlie,

“as you can brake? My business I dunnow; O no, I don’t.”

“Well, don’t get riled, my man, I only spoke; but if your master here will trust me on him, I’ll show you,” Charlie said, “how you may manage him, and break him of that stupid rearing trick. How have you ridden him,” he asked; “with good sharp spurs and snaffle?”

“Sharp spurs and snaffle!” sneered the man; “no spurs and curb. I guessed at once how much you knew about it. If you be foolish enough to try the spurs, young sir, you’ll find he’ll very soon settle you; for he’ll break your neck, as he’d break mine if I was such a born fool as you think I be. Sharp spurs indeed! If you comed out with the cakes, I stopt in till the loaves; I warn’t half baked, nor borned yesterday. No, no,” said the man, shaking his head, “whatever else he be, Jem baint no fool!”

‘The breaker, then, got savage on the matter?’ said Wells.

‘It seemed so,’ Archer said.

“Then,” said Charlie to the farmer, “if you will risk the horse, I’ll risk the neck ; and all that I shall want is a snaffle and spurs. No martingale or curb, no stirrups or a whip ; merely a snaffle, Mr. Mowbray, and long spurs with sharp rowels in them ; mine are blunted. They set one’s tops off, but I never use them. I hate a scratched horse,” said Charlie, “and a horse that needs them. Come here, my boy,” he called out to a youngster, “and hold my mare a bit.”

‘The farmer, I, and all of us,’ said Archer, ‘tried hard to turn him, but we could not. We told him,’ said he, ‘that he would break his neck, and that it was a foolish thing to meddle with such an animal. But as he seemed so stiff about it, the horse was fetched, and the curb exchanged for a snaffle.’

‘What sort of a horse was he?’ asked Wells ; ‘a Cruiser brute?’

‘No, a big good-looking horse,’ said Archer, ‘well up to weight, bay, with black points. Taking his own spurs off, he put on the pair they brought him, which,’ said Archer, ‘were regular prickers ; and he then led the horse down into the straw-yard and mounted him slowly and deliberately, the brute putting back his ears, but standing still. Then,’ said Archer, ‘he slipped the stirrups off and threw them down, so as to be safer if the horse fell over, just felt his mouth, and then—looked out for squalls.’

‘But he could not stick him in that way,’ said Wells.

‘He could and did,’ said Archer ; ‘for he has, as you know,’ said he, ‘such a splendid grip ! I knew him, Harry, lose a stirrup once with hounds, and go on too without it to the finish.’

‘You did?’ said Wells.

‘Yes, and the same with girths; a state of things that is just ten times worse,’ said Archer.

‘I should think so indeed,’ Wells said.

‘It was two seasons ago, and they snapt right through as he was going over a fence; enough, you’ll say, to pitch him on his head. They were some that had been used with a buck-jumper, and so had got stretched and frayed; but for more than twenty minutes, for I saw it,’ said Archer, ‘he held a line and kept his place with hounds solely by grip, the saddle never turning or the ends catching, as he did his fences. We had some big things too that day, that took some doing.’

‘Well,’ said Harry, ‘I will give him best, John. I should think he was stiffish the next day.’

‘No doubt he was,’ said Archer, ‘with all his muscles tense; but he would not own

it. Well, the first thing that he did was to let the horse walk, and, much to our surprise, he found him steady. Before he had ridden him, however, twice round the yard,' said Archer, 'he was up in the air in a moment; but just as he seemed like coming backwards—and we looked for Charlie to slip off him—he bounded like a shot and dropped again, through spurs sent home.'

'The deuce he did!' said Wells.

'Then he tried the trick again,' said Archer, 'with the same result; a straight dart forwards, then a snort and stop, pawing with his foreleg and shaking his head, as if he scarcely knew what to make of it. Each time the horse reared, the spurs were sent in, which made him bound and drop. Then Charlie patted him. In half an hour, with many a shake of head, that horse,' said Archer, 'walked from the straw-yard to a field, and quietly; and then went round it without once rearing or attempting to,

caressed and petted all the way by Charlie, who put him through his paces to a gallop and sat him splendidly, no horse going better.'

'I could not have believed it, John,' said Harry.

'Nor I,' said Archer, 'if I had not seen it. "There, then," Charlie said, as he rode up to us, "follow that plan, my man, and you will find it answer. Lower your hands when he comes up on end, and send the spurs in once and once only, but quickly and sharply, and so save your neck. You see, Mr. Mowbray," said Charlie, turning to the farmer, "in going forwards he is bound to drop; he cannot tumble over when you 'shoot' him.

"But mind one thing, my man," said Charlie to the breaker, "you must not spur him till he is in the air. You want to trick him; so all the time, besides, talk gently to him, as if he were the best-behaved horse

out. You thus deceive him; and he will soon think that when he comes up on end in that way he hurts himself, because your kindness, with the hurt, will puzzle him; and if you continue it, it will so bother him," said Charlie, "that it will altogether throw him out of count, and he will very soon give it up entirely. You try it, man, for what I say is right; you will completely cure him in a week, if you will, that's certain."

"How did the fellow take it?" said Wells.

"Like the magpie," said Archer; "he said but little, but he thought a deal. "I have had some brutes to manage before to-day, Mr. Mowbray, for one friend or other—besides," Charlie said, "I have bred for years, and I break my own, and in a lot of youngsters you do get some most awful tempers—but I have never yet failed," he said, "to make them handle well and safe to ride; and except, perhaps, in such a case as this

I never punish, and here no more than you have just seen. I have no faith in it, Mr. Mowbray," said he, "nor ever had."

'He is right enough there, John, as I have found,' said Wells.

'Then,' said Archer, 'Charlie got off the horse and gave him up to the man, and put on his own spurs again and mounted his mare, and then he and the rest of us started for home, he telling Mowbray that if the man failed, to send the horse over to Boscobel, and he himself would cure him. You know it, Harry, for I think you have been there?'

'Yes,' said Wells, 'I have; and it is a nice place too. It was formerly the Warren; but that was years ago.'

'Many years,' replied Archer; 'in the old people's time. We overtook the hounds, and gently trotted down by the river-side, and got back home at twelve, Charlie well pleased that he had come with me.'

‘I should think so,’ said Wells; ‘quite a jolly morning! He will have the horse, you’ll see; that man won’t manage him; his nerve is gone—not worth a button, John. I wish,’ said he, as they crossed the garden for the house, to have a chat with the aunt, ‘you would stay the night, old fellow; the Doctor promised to look in this evening.’

‘No, not to-night,’ said Archer.

But he did so; for after tea, time passed so pleasantly, the evening glow had vanished from the ceiling, and gray come before they thought that it was even sunset; so, as the moon would not be up till ten, his horse was bedded.

And when the Doctor left after supper to go to his patient on the common, and then, if she was comfortable, to ride to his home in the village, they turned out with him to see how the moon looked, and to have a sniff of the cool night air and to

open the gates for him. And as they came back again under the apple-trees in the end orchard, and stayed there as the sound of his horse's hoofs died away, to listen to the owls hooting in the woods just over the water—for those glorious old woods, where the undergrowth was as high as your head and the light only came with a flicker, were on either side of the river, and went billowing away for miles, dipping as the hills dipped—they saw the young moon rising over the treetops, paling as she rose.

So they sat there for a while on the wicket, listening to the weir. And there was a rustle in the hedgerow where the red dead leaves were lying as a stoat moved amongst them; and the dry sticks in the orchard cracked brittle on the trees as they were hit by the apples that dropped ripe into the grass. And a fox crossed the meadows below them; for they heard amongst the sheep the bell of the bell-wether, that

made them look there, and they saw him, like a lengthy brown dog, running by them.

Then, as the wind stirred the bushes that were beside them, and sent a little shiver amongst the leaves on the oak over them, and on the elm that was upon the bank, the murmur of the weir came up to them with a moan, that rose and fell again as the night wind went sighing up the valley, lifting the leaves as it went.

And as they went on up to the house the vault of the heavens looked high, and the stars in the blue of it golden ; for the night was a frosty one, and it would be fine on the morrow. And when the white fogs crept on by the water and the wood-shades deepened, the silence of night filled the valley ; for all were asleep at the farm, and the birds in the ivy were quiet.

The next morning, after an early breakfast, John Archer was off betimes ; while there was a coolness in the air and a catch

of frost on the meadows, as it showed now by the river, for the nights got cold there, and while the clematis and the hopbine in the hedges glistened with dew and gossamer. And the blue mists that were up the valley hid the hills, and rolled in light wreaths from the woods and hollows. And the lanes were still and quiet, and the dust upon the roads was unmarked by wheels; and the only sounds to be heard were the caw of the rooks and the songs of birds; and the smoke, with a fine day promise, went straight up between the woods from the cottages that were dotted about there.

It was a morning that suited him, fresh and nice, and with all that sense of breeziness that you get from the rustle of the boughs and the falling of the leaves; for they were fluttering in yellow flakes from the trees, winnowing to the red ones, or drifting across with the breeze to drop lightly into the brambles that lay clustered

in the hedges there, purple with blackberries.

And as he left the lanes for the hills, and rode up through the woods by the winding paths—where the light chequered them, and the shadows of the trees fell upon them—he thought of Nature's bounty and her beauties, and of all those unbought pleasures worth the having that she ever lavishes upon those who love her. And when he had reached the top of the wood, he looked down into the dingles, and he saw far below him, between the long branches of some spreading yews, the valley mellowing in the morning light, as the sun shone, and blue burst through the sky.

So getting off a while to rest his horse, he sat there, looking down into the valley through the tree-trunks, and in the silence drank in all its beauty. And as he watched the shadows creep out from the hedgerows, as the early farm-sounds came up to him

—with what pleasure few know but those who love Nature as he loved her—and saw the sunny sweeps of meadow aftermath that were splashed with the purples of the saffron-flowers, he noticed how the long lengths of hop-yards that were beside them —whose tint at sundown is a sight to see—looked amber in the light, and with what a sheen the willowy river that was flickering in the sun shone so far away.

And he also noticed on the uplands, where but so short a time ago white barley swayed and golden corn was bending—for the harvest always fell late there to the sickles of the reapers—how pure in the morning light were the tints upon the stubbles, and how well they came in between the rich browns in the woods, where the trees were russetting, and how good was the backing to them of the woods beyond, that went sloping high up the hills with their colours—their grays and their blues and

their purples—till they swept to their crest or went over them.

Then, as he mounted again to go home, as a light breeze rose, soft gray clouds that were white-edged moved through the blue over him, and their shadows chased the sunshine in the valley. And seeing it as he did there, framed by the olive-green of the trees that were before him, he felt the beauty of it.

And then, in his own quiet way, John Archer rode on thoughtfully to his home at the Grange.





CHAPTER V.

ANDREWS OF CONEY GREEN AND THE HAMLET OF HONEYBROOK.

‘GOOD-MORNING,’ said Oliver to Andrews, as they met by the Fox hotel in the county town, and rode into the yard together. ‘Why, what became of you, Ted, the other day; we never saw an inch of your countenance, old fellow, after we left the gorse—did you come to grief?’

‘I did,’ was the reply, ‘and intense grief, over some stiff rails down by Furze-hill, where I had a regular purler and a lost shoe; with hounds going like steam, and no blacksmith handy. So I got thrown out, and I turned for home; which, considering it was the first day of the season, and there was

a splendid “field” out, was certainly a nuisance. You had a very good run, George, I hear.’

‘Yes,’ said Oliver, ‘we had, for an hour and forty minutes, with only that slight cheek by the park-palings, through those beggarly sheep getting out; but which, by the bye, as letting you up amongst us, was a good thing for you.

‘Well, come in,’ said he, as they left the stables and turned into a corridor bright with greenery; ‘what are you going to have?’

‘O, some of the old sort, I suppose,’ said Andrews, ‘some bitter; there is nothing better, I think. Have you sold your hops?’

‘All but a few pockets; but I am in no hurry, for prices are up, and mine is a clean sample. I wish I had not sold,’ said Oliver; ‘they will fetch more money yet. “Farnhams” are middling, and there are but few “Olds” left.’

Entering ‘the bar,’ which, as it was market-day, was filled with farmers, graziers, hop-growers, and others—most of them local men, and many of them friends or acquaintances—they shook hands with some and nodded to others, and then, as the hunting men amongst them continued to discuss ‘the good thing they had on Tuesday,’ the conversation merged from hops and crops to hounds and horses.

Sitting about there—a light and airy room, and large and lofty, with cosy nooks, pot-ferns and flowers, and couches—were many of the best men in the district; that being, on market-days, the great meeting-place, the resort of many, and a lounge for all.

And it was there that, on the last day of each week, gossip was retailed, reports floated, prices fixed, and the runs of the week talked over. It was there too that the Hunt-dinners were held; the landlord,

genial and gentlemanly, and great in greyhounds, being a large subscriber and a thorough sportsman; as was also his son, who, mounted well, went well.

But while the hunting men stretch it as to fences, and the dealers stretch it as to price, it will be well to give here a few words about the two friends, who, seated in a quiet corner, were looking over the papers, and deep in the mysteries of the 'Country Markets.'

Oliver, a good-looking young fellow of about five or six and twenty, was a hop-grower, well and favourably known in the district as 'a good sort and a straight goer'—a summary of character meaning much—and resident, as was his friend Andrews, in a small hamlet that was pretty and picturesque, and twelve miles distant from the station. Both were in easy circumstances, and Andrews the richer; he being the son of a Manchester merchant,

who was reputed to be wealthy, and known to be charitable.

The eldest son, Robert, was in business with his father, and this one, the second son, Edward, or 'Teddy,' as they called him, being a good shot and fond of hunting, the old man took a small farm for him at Honeybrook, in the Teme valley, and on the Herefordshire side of the river; a hamlet that was backed by high hills and faced by wood and water; and the farm was a fruitful farm, and it had just enough land about it to give employment to his son, and so keep him from being idle. And he liked Honeybrook; for, as he said when he came to settle at it, 'it was really a jolly little place, and so snug and quiet.'

And so it was; for it lay in a hollow low down in a long drip in the valley, with wooded hills overlooking it; and with hop-yards sliding into it; and it was so hidden by old hawthorns and apple-trees, and

clumps and garden growths, that you had to come upon it all at once, which made it the jollier.

For the way into it dropped suddenly between high banks, that were rough and tangled with gorse and foxglove roots, and with fern and brambles; where the rabbits stayed and looked at you, and the birds sang on as you passed into the shadow of the limes, listening to the bees.

And at the bottom of the bank, in the sunlight—for the trees ended there—was the church; where the road turned short round to the left by the rookery, and you got such a splendid bit of open country and river scenery, across the big pool at the court-house, past the island where the flag flapped.

The church too was an old one, heavy with ivy, and gray and weather-stained, and you went down steps into it; and as you came quietly down the bank leading

your horse, you saw that the trees framed it, and that the square tower and the great yews stood out clearly against the high elms, under an arch of sky, and with a backing of cornfields and copses, with hills behind them that stretched away up the valley, graying as they went; and there was a deep-blue distance beyond them that you caught as the white pigeons swept across it when they flew from the tithe-barn to the lich-gate, to coo and flutter there, until the schoolgirls came to swing and play about the mounting-block, and to caw at the rooks squabbling in the rookery.

And also at the bottom of the bank was a brook—you could hear the ripple of it before you saw it—that, though it was made to dip there under the road, to leave all dry at the church, and to make foam-falls in the shrubberies, yet did pretty much as it liked up the village. So, as it had the lane to itself, it made it ‘a watery lane’ for a mile

or more—except a bit of a strip on the high bank above it, just for the foot-people—from where it came out of the woods and through the meadows, and brought the trout with it from under the big stones in the dingles, where the light was twilight, from the close boughs meeting.

But shallow as the brook was, there were some good trout in it; for you could see them poising or darting for the banks as you rode splashing through it. For after you got beyond the church and the farm buildings, and passed the ivied house where the sparrows were—and where they let you know they were—and the half-timbered houses with the cut yews and the box-borders, and the red-brick place with the bushed laurustinuses and the dovecot, the road so narrowed that it became all brook!

So you just swung your legs up on each side of the saddle, to save spottling your

stirrup-irons, and let your horse enjoy the coolness of it, as well as yourself, as you 'lolloped' along, chatting to the old women in the gardens, or gossiping with the youngsters paddling in the brook for primroses, or whatever happened to be growing there on the banks beside it.

Not that they wanted them, by any means, as all the banks were yellow with them, or bright with the other flowers that in their turn grew there; but the having to go into the water for them was a something they ought not to do, and so they enjoyed it, as you could see when they scampered out—the young monkeys!—and put their stockings on, laughing as only hearty and happy children can laugh. You could hear their joyous little screams so long after you left them, that you would turn a time or two in your saddle, thinking they were near you.

And a very jolly little brook it was

too; for, except at flood-time, it was shallow enough to have plenty of tinkle about it, for it had lots of twistings and ripplings where the sandstone ridged it. And up above it, and on either side of it, were some thatched cottages—old gray ones; and some gardens and orchards; and a little farm or two, where there were fowls about; and a wheelwright's, where the path widened; and some cherry-orchards, with some red-tiled cottages, and some bee-hives by them; and a dismal-looking old place, with some poplars round it, that was shut up, because it was 'haunted of a ghost, sir.'

All the way up, indeed, was pretty; for the women there were great hands at holly-hocks and gillies, and rose-bushes and scarlet-runners, that they trained by the privet-hedges for the passers-by to see, and to give them an excuse for a gossip with them whenever they had the chance of it; for

the old dames would stand, scissors in hand, by the bushes, making believe to be trimming them.

It was a nice-smelling place too, all about there; for what with the violets and the sweetbrier, and the beans and 'the blossom,' and the honeysuckles and the meadow-sweet, and the whiffs of hay, each in its season, there was no lack of sweet scents in that village.

But the best of it all was up at the end there, where the road branched off at the foot-bridge to go to the next hamlet; and where you looked across the dingle to the big fox-cover, where they always 'found,' or up the long stubbles to the grass-lands, that sloped to the sky and the white clouds. For it was there that the orchards were thicker and the fruit was the finest; and when they were heaped all over with their red and their white blossom, and thick with bees, and loud with the hum of them,

the scent that was there then was a thing to be remembered.

Altogether it was an old - fashioned fruity little place, where the farmers sold hops and cider, and the cottagers eggs and 'posies.' For they went to market on Saturdays, and they thanked the Lord other days; and though they did 'putt' their legs up 'o' Sundays, and think'd o' nothin,' when their old rector was exhorting them, they certainly were a devout people, for they 'thanked the Lord' for everything, from hop - bines to honey.

If Bella Birch was got to school after a boxing, or Jane Styles had her flowers 'cheapened,' or Theresa Simpson's youngest had to be revaccinated, or the 'rampagious' donkey was pounded, or the relieving officer's pony lost 'altogether,' they were that contented sort of people that they were equally grateful — so 'thanked

the Lord' for all and everything, as 'became them' as Christians.

And they had their manners also ; for they 'sir'd' the pig-killer, and 'good man'd' the postman, and did hat-in-hand to the parson, who, poor man, being seventy-eight and short-sighted, often mistook their 'obeysance' for asking alms, and would potter on with, 'I never give money to beggars—bad plan, bad plan ; give you some meat though ; come round, come round.'

It was a very early place too ; for except when they had company at the courthouse, all the villagers looked to snore at eight in the winter and nine in the summer, 'reg'lar like ;' but when 'the company' caine, they willingly robbed themselves of their rest to 'see the carriages' and 'the gentlefolks.' Hence, going to bed so early, they were early risers ; and they brushed the dew off the grass, and they made their mark in the meadows ; for they

were up betimes, and were out with the lark ; which, as one of them observed, as he perhaps thought of his younger days—he was only sixty - three, and it served the juvenile old boy all the day after to tell it amongst the mowers—was better than being out ‘for one.’

And ‘Teddy’ went amongst them, and liked them, and they liked him ; and they testified publicly that ‘his head was screwed on, and his heart in the right place ;’ which, besides being a satisfactory state of things anatomically and mechanically, at once put him right with the whole village ; so right, in fact, that he never was known after that to be short of wasp-cake or whipeord ; the two things they always asked you to have of them when they really did like you—the first to ‘tice the fish, and the second to tickle the animal in the dog-cart.

So he made up his mind to stay there ; for, as he said, ‘It’s a nightingale place, my

dear fellow, for the meadows are cowslip ones; and the lanes are filled with violets, purple and white ones, plentiful as daisies; and there are primroses on the banks, and wild flowers in the woods, so thick there that you crush them as you walk. And “the blossom” is glorious—cherry and plum, and pear and apple—and its smell delicious; and the hops are splendid; and the fishing and the shooting and the hunting there is each first-rate.’ So that, as all there appeared to him to be superlative, he could not well do less than be satisfied.

But as he knew but little of farming when, eighteen months previously, he took to it, his father employed a bailiff to superintend the farm for him and to see to the tilling. Oliver, therefore, whose own farm lay but three miles from there—just on the outskirts of the parish—kindly offered his services, when they met one evening at the rectory,

in the way of supervision and general information; so that ere long the two near neighbours became firm friends, and hunted, shot, and fished together; and their sisters, Loo and Cissy, had but few secrets from each other.

With such companionship, and with the benefit of his friend's experience, the bailiff was parted with at the year's end; and the little farm, 'Coney Green,' only a hundred and forty acres, was now, and had been for the past six months, entirely managed by Andrews himself, who, from constantly associating with the farmers of the district, was fast getting into those plain, sensible, and homely ways which, causing a wholesome horror of debt, made them the manly men they were—sturdy, free-feeling, and independent; able and willing to pay their way, 'if so be it pleased God the rain didn't beat 'em.'

Barely two-and-twenty, with excellent

health and spirits, an iron constitution, and an even temper, hospitable to a degree, and with the means for hospitality—no wonder that Andrews, or, as he was familiarly called by his friends, ‘Teddy Andrews,’ was well liked. But with sound sense and good general knowledge he had yet a marked simplicity of manner that indicated credulity, and that often laid him open to the designs of the crafty. More than once had he been ‘well bitten;’ and more than once had George Oliver counselled caution in the varied dealings of buying and selling incidental to his pursuits. In horses he was especially weak, fancying, like many others, that because he had hunted for two seasons, all the ‘points’ of a horse must necessarily be known to him.

Honest himself, and thoroughly straightforward, he ever thought others were the same; and ‘wearing his heart upon his sleeve,’ he never suspected duplicity, never

imagined deceit. To use a West-country phrase, ‘he showed his cards, and they trumped his trick; he opened his mouth, and the man jumped down it:’ a duplex saying for the same thing—too little reticence and too much belief; a combination of circumstances that has brought many a man to grief.

Returning now to the other occupants of the room, their conversation continued in an animated strain for some time; then, each going out on his own business, they separated, to meet again at ‘the ordinary’ up-stairs, or later in the bar, so as to have a chat together before riding home.





CHAPTER VI.

MOONLIGHT ON THE HILLS—EXPERIENCE PAID FOR.

‘HAVE you any more to do?’ asked Oliver, as they met again in the evening; for it had been a busy day with him, and he was later than usual.

‘Only,’ was the reply, ‘to call about some fish I ordered, to see if they have sent it to the carrier. I shall be back again in ten minutes, and then,’ said Andrews, ‘I am ready when you are.’

‘Well,’ said Oliver, ‘I don’t want to be too late home; so I will order the horses, Ted, and wait in the yard.’

Half an hour later they were in the saddle, and with a splendid evening before them for their journey home.

Passing under the old high tower of the cathedral, they went along the quay up to the bridge, that took them out into the open country, and thence to districts full of rich pasture-land and hops and orchards. And they rode on by the old-fashioned gardens in the suburbs, and reached the outskirts.

And as they passed the quaint houses there, with their long avenues and their pigeon-boxes and their stately trees, the evening glow had spread across the landscape, and had caught with its golden light the country-seats that lay around there, belted by copses, and with water by them. And they went on, by pastures and stubbles and plough-land, to by-lanes and commons, where the gorse was a mass and the gipsies were numerous. Then, checking their horses as they got near a hill, Andrews broke silence thus :

‘ Where did you go to when I came to

grief? I don't know if they have it in the *Herald*.'

'Kept to the scent, and went on, Ted,' said Oliver. 'The hounds,' said he, 'soon crossed the road, and springing the fence together, they raced along the meadows as mute as mice, till suddenly they dipped and showed again; and then, as they "broke" well in line, their chorus came to us most musically. We knew by that some brook-work was before us, and that pace was needed, for it was Overdale—a racing bit, and always many in it. I don't suppose you know it, Ted,' said he.

'What, Overdale? Few people but know that,' said Andrews, 'either by sad experience or by name. The former, George, would certainly have been mine had not I been thrown out.'

'You missed a bath, old fellow, I believe,' said Oliver. 'Its banks are honey-combed from being washed by very fre-

quent floods, and they have straight sides, just like a railway cutting; so that where they are not slanted for the cattle, it is no easy matter to effect a landing. The last time we had it,' said he, 'seven out of twelve—though they were first-flight men—were into it, and under, and bobbing about like big floats in the water; so that will tell you that it takes some doing.'

'Yes,' Andrews said, 'I have heard it is a clipper.'

'As we got near it,' continued Oliver, 'Stevens—on the gray—gave us "a lead," for he was on his water-jumper; and cleverly he did it. Burton went next, and safely dropped the chestnut—his hot one—and Warden after him, along with Archer. Then Wells, then King, one down, one in; I next,' said Oliver, 'and missed a grassing, "Beauty" stumbling. Just as we were getting into stride again, thud comes Fred Collins right against the bank, and vanishes;

Jem Griffin too, who took it at the widest. And after we had landed, and turned in our saddles,' said he, 'to see who got in and who got over, we saw lots rushing at it as hard as they could pelt; glad, no doubt, to have it soon over. Some did get over, but a lot got in; but as there was a stiff line of rails in the pasture, that needed both eyes and hands, it prevented our watching them. But afterwards, on "counting up the noses," we made but sixteen total. The rest—a good large "field"—being brooked, or roadsters; for they never reached us till we had killed our fox.

'You will see the line we took; it is in the *Field*. I met the postman as I came,' said Oliver, 'and looked. He took the papers on, though, with the letters; but you shall have it when we send to-morrow. Loo has some things she has worked, Ted, for your sister.'

‘Thanks,’ said Andrews; ‘Cissy will be pleased. Much stiff, George?’

‘Well, yes,’ said he; ‘but a splendid country, with doubles and good rails, and brooks and bullfinches. I got my full share, Ted, in size and “nasty” places, so I was thankful; still for the pickers there were donkey fences, which some I know negotiated calmly, as if they really thought them worth the doing. Just fancy!’ George said.

‘There certainly are men who’d jump a thistle, and cast about how they shall best get over some small gutter; and yet come out,’ said Andrews, ‘with the hounds, to say they do so. It is most laughable.’

‘It is,’ said Oliver, ‘wild in the lanes, but frightened in the fields. Macadam courage coupled with fence-fever. Such men should always come out with a crupper, and hold on to it stoutly.

‘The view from here,’ said he, as they reached the brow of the hill—Crookthorpe

Hill—‘I always think is so fine. I do not wonder at people pulling up to look at it. Even now, sloping away as it does for miles and miles, though half its charms are hidden in the duskiness, it is very beautiful,’ said Oliver; ‘don’t you think so, Ted?’

‘Yes,’ said Andrews; ‘it is almost as fine as that from Harry Wells’s place, or from the hill by Manor Wood.’

‘They meet there shortly,’ said Oliver. ‘John Archer is going; but it is too out-lying a fixture for me, at least just then. It is a long way from his place; but I think he intends getting up to Fred Collins the night before, so as to be handy for it.’

‘I have never been there with hounds,’ said Ted; ‘but we had a picnic there last summer—that is, June twelvemonths—and I thought it then,’ said he, ‘a very jolly place, and the view magnificent.’

But, as George Oliver remarked, the view from where they were was then, as

they saw it, even in the dusk, ‘very beautiful;’ for so golden was the sky with evening glow, the wooded hills looked black that closed the valley, giving a grandeur to their long length of sky-line; and just above it was a flight of rooks, flying from their feeding-grounds straight home to roost. And down beneath it were deep purple shadows, cut by white fog, that, rising to a level from the meadows, looked like a river.

And as the gold got green, as Andrews and Oliver rode onwards, some glow-worm lights shone out upon the hills from cottages; and lower down the slopes some larger lights were seen as well, from farms; and in the hollows they were also twinkling, and thickening around a red one—the forge-fire that was down in the village below, where the blacksmith was busy; for, as they came down the hill, they could both hear the clink on his anvil.

As the green got gray, and they went

by the mill in the flat, where the big pool and the willows and the half-sunken boat and the putchins were, it was all silent there—silent as the wheel; for work was over, and the bats were skinning.

Then the gray got blue, and the stars came out, one by one, as Ted and Oliver trotted through the valley; and by the time they had reached the woods the sky was thick with them. And they rode on there along the bridle-paths, scaring the owls and starting many a rabbit in the glades that were dusky beneath them. And when they emerged from under the tall trees, and passed from the darkness of them into the white light upon the hills, it was indeed beautiful; for the moon was rising, and the yews and the hawthorns were throwing their long shadows on the turf, that lay white in the moonbeams.

And they rode there silently in the moonlight, for the turf was too soft and

springy to give back their footfalls; and the only sound they heard was the clank of the little gates as they passed through them.

And at the end of the hills they again passed into the darkness of the woods. And when, at last, they left them, and began to dip down to the lanes for home, the moonlight had fallen upon the valley, and they could see, as the moon caught it, the white streak of the river through the trees in the hedgerows; for the fog in the meadows was thin, and it lay lightly on the grass. And they hastened on along the lanes between the copse-bordered banks to the cross-roads; and there they pulled up, as their ways diverged, Andrews's farm, Coney Green, lying to the right, and Oliver's, the Brook Farm, three miles to the left of it.

‘Will you come round with me, old fellow, for a pipe?’ said Andrews. ‘It won’t take you long, and you need not be back, you know, till after supper.’

‘No, not to-night,’ said George; ‘it is much too late, and I have to pay the men, for I was short of change this morning, and they will be waiting for me; and Loo will too. Not to-night.’

‘Well, mind and come on Monday then, to dinner, and see just what you think of my new purchase—a bay, my boy—a fizzer!’

‘What, on the deal again?’ said Oliver. ‘Who is the biter?’

‘Implying by that term,’ said Andrews, ‘that I am “bitten.” Why, Murby. I met with him on Tuesday out with hounds. He rode up when I came to grief, and pointed out a smith’s shop, and went with me; so we rode home together.’

‘And made a deal, of course?’ said Oliver. ‘Catch Murby civil if he can’t gain by it!’

‘Yes, made a deal,’ said Ted; ‘a good one too!’

‘O youth and innocence,’ said George,

‘how art thou victimised! No greater “do” than he, Ted, walks in shoes. What was the figure?’

‘Thirty.’

‘And what the purchase?’

‘A cob, a dappled bay; round as a barrel, and with four black legs; strong as an elephant, and a splendid stepper—a noted trotter. He looks like carrying me right well to market, and giving most upon the road the go-by.’

‘By running clean away the first time you try him!’

‘Not so, friend George; now don’t you be severe. He is good with hounds too, and knows the stone-wall business. He was with the “Cotswold” in the Bredon country.’

‘And all that lot,’ said Oliver, ‘for thirty?’

‘Yes, with half-crown out, chop-money.’

‘O Teddy, Teddy, “sold” again art thou, you helpless innocent! Why, Jemmy

Murby is the “deadest nail” in all the country, that everybody knows; and so might you have heard. Why, he would even do his father in a deal for twopence-halfpenny, and think it clever!

‘Wait, wait, George, wait,’ said Andrews; ‘you have not seen the cob—you will find you are mistaken just for once.’

‘I only hope, for your sake, that I am; I fear I am not. A good bay cob,’ said Oliver, ‘like that, is worth, ay twice that sum, as park-hack for some gentleman in town, to daily pound along for constitutional in Rotten-row. Thirty pounds indeed! If he is sound, a dealer would give fifty. When can I see him?’

‘O, to-morrow.’

‘Well, to-morrow’s Sunday.’

‘Say Monday, then,’ said Andrews. ‘I shall be in all day. Come early, and to dinner. Then see him, ride him, and try him round the fences.’

‘I’ll look him over first.’

‘O, he can jump,’ said Ted, ‘for Murby told me so.’

‘No doubt he can, at sudden swipe of some good double thong, and from the one side of the stable to the other. O Ted!’ laughed Oliver.

‘George, you are too bad. He is, as you will find for once, a good one.’

‘All right; I’ll see him. O, what about his tail?’

‘He has one.’

‘Now has he, though?’ said George. ‘How ever could they do it at the price! Good-night, old boy. On Monday, then, I will come across and see him.’

‘Well, don’t forget. Good-night; and come,’ said Ted, ‘to dinner.’

And as the noise of their horses’ hoofs died away, and the one sound ceased before the other, through the winding lanes and distance that was different, there was

stillness and silence; for the night was calm and quiet, and it was only in the neighbouring woods that the least sound could be heard, for the wind was at rest, and it had not yet rustled up the valley.

But there the leaves were dropping dead from the trees; for the life had gone out of them, and they had lifted their last to the blue sky over them. And they were drifting from the boughs to the brambles, to fall into the ferns; and to find there a resting-place on moss and grass. And the canopy that would be over them would be of green and gold; for the time was autumn, and the ferns were flushing.

And when Monday came George Oliver rode over to Honeybrook to Andrews's farm there—Coney Green—that was close to 'the watery lane,' and had the horse out.

'He is not bad-looking, that is certain, Teddy,' said he, as Andrews stood him, with his head up, by the stables.

‘Put the lad on him, and then let him walk.

‘He is a fairish mover. Now, boy,’ said Oliver, ‘just slowly trot him on towards the gate, turn him sharp round and canter back to us.

‘He goes well, certainly,’ said he, as the boy pulled up.

‘I told you so,’ said Andrews, ‘but you would not believe it.’

‘Don’t be too fast, Ted; we will wait a bit. Just take him on again, my lad,’ said Oliver, ‘a good brisk trot, and at the same pace bring him back again.

‘There now, jump off,’ said he.

‘Ah, I thought as much! Look here, Ted. Do you know what that means?’ said Oliver, picking up the horse’s leg as he spoke; ‘bevelled for “speedy cut;” to hit with horn, not iron. Feel here,’ said he; ‘you see it is quite tender even now. That is the place he hits when, as you say, he

trots out “straight and sharp.” There is dirt upon it. He is dear at thirty pence. I would not even have him as a gift; for when he does come down, it will,’ said Oliver, ‘be like a shot, and without notice.

‘See here again; my fingers are quite greasy. That is the stuff they use for broken knees,’ said George; ‘to hide white hair. Had your lad cleaned his knees, you would have seen it. Here, boy,’ said he, ‘go to the house and ask them for an iron and some brown paper—the iron hot. We shall see, then,’ said Oliver, ‘if what I say is right.’

‘Well, this, I must say, is an awful nuisance. I thought for once,’ said Ted, ‘I had done well. He told me all about him, and seemed so candid. I never thought of looking at the shoeing, or getting hold of him below the knee.’

‘And which you should have done,’ said Oliver, ‘as I have told you. Here comes

the lad ; so now then, Ted, for test. The grease removed, I think you will find a patch, white under black. Just as I thought —look there !

“ “A speedy cutter,” with two broken knees. You’re done, old fellow. Sell him for what he’ll fetch; for if you don’t he will break your neck before you are ten days older.

“ “Thrown out” you were,’ said Oliver, ‘ we know ; also “let in.”

“ The world’s a wicked one, and ‘ sharps’ are in it ;
For ‘ flats,’ you see, are picked up in a minute !” ’

‘ Put the brute in,’ said Ted ; ‘ Cissy is calling us to come to dinner.’





CHAPTER VII.

A CHAT IN THE STUDIO—JOHNSON AND KATE ARCHER.

‘WELL, Johnson, how are you?’ said Archer, as he turned into the studio in Elm-tree-walk, and found his friend—as usual there—busy at a canvas. ‘Why don’t you stick that horrible creation in the corner?’ said he, giving the lay figure a tap on the head as he passed it, that altered the balance of it, and stopped it peering into the colour-box; ‘it is enough to startle a fellow! Here, hide his countenance, man, for goodness’ sake,’ said Archer, as he picked up a wideawake and brought it down with a bang over the face of it. ‘How you do work, Johnson!’

‘It is play to me, Archie,’ was the reply.

‘*Labor ipse voluptas.* When do you return to the Grange?’ said Johnson.

‘O, in about a fortnight, I suppose,’ said Archer; ‘there will be some home-fixtures about then.’

‘I think I shall be back about then myself, just for a week or two; and after that I must make my head-quarters here,’ said Johnson, ‘and for some time too. I can’t half work at home with all those woods and hills tempting one to be idle; and I hope you will come in too when you can, old fellow; for if we are to keep faith with the huntsman, when the frost comes, and he is off duty, we must be up at the kennels a little oftener than we have been. There are those hounds and the old gray that you “rubbed in,”’ said he, ‘just in the same state as they were a month ago.’

‘Well, you finish them,’ said Archer, ‘there’s a good fellow; it is to be a joint affair, you know, so it will be all one. His

old woman, as he calls her, is pretty proud about it.'

'Why did you not come in to my place last night?' said Johnson. 'Two of the St. John's-wood men were there, Dick Simms and Perrott; they are down from town for just a day or two. Dick's picture was accepted, by the bye, and sold.'

'Where at—the Dudley?'

'No, at Suffolk-street; they hung him well.'

'I am glad of that,' said Archer, 'for he is such a decent fellow; and Perrott, has he sold?'

'The larger one he has, but not the others. He has a commission though for a pair of small ones. Two "circulars,"' said Johnson.

'That's right,' said Archer. 'Did they say how all the fellows were at the old quarters?'

'O, scratching at it,' said Johnson,

‘with a few sales in the season to help the “pot-boilers.”’

‘Have they hung you in New-street?’ said Archer.

‘Yes, and fairly. I have had a letter from the secretary, and I find,’ said Johnson, ‘that they have used me very well—one next below “the line,” two just above it, and the other picture they have “skied”; but it was a duffer and not up to much—that heathy bit I got at Stanton Common. You remember it; I mulled the foreground?’

‘Yes,’ replied Archer; ‘it was not your best one, certainly; but they ought to have managed you line space for that woodland one, because that was really a good picture.’

‘I am glad you like it,’ said Johnson; ‘but however good a picture might be, they know that I am but an outsider, an amateur, and therefore they have no idea of giving me priority in the hanging over one who paints for a living; and I cannot

blame them. I only wonder they give me a place at all; but their secretary is a very good fellow, and they are a good sort there altogether, a very good sort,' said Johnson, 'and they hang impartially. You were out with the hounds, I think, yesterday?'

'Yes,' said Archer, 'I was, or I should have been with you; but when you come to kick your tops off, and settle down before a rousing fire, you do not feel much inclined after a day's hunting to turn out again. It was late too when I returned; the clock struck seven as I left the station; and after dinner I dropped off fast asleep, tired out.'

Johnson was a very good fellow, and he and Archer were great chums. They were together in Rome for some time, as we have seen, sketching with some other men, and at home also they were often sketching out on the hills and in the woods; for though Archer did but little in that way

himself, Johnson painted regularly—‘fadding’ at it, as he said, ‘for the love of it,’ and more for occupation than from necessity; for come of a good family, and the only son of a barrister of some standing, he was left at his father’s death in a comfortable position; so the Civil Service knew him no longer.

And it was then that he left London, and settled in Worcestershire; having been delighted with the scenery there, and in the adjoining county of Herefordshire, when he came down on a visit to Archer, whose acquaintance he had made in the Temple-gardens. For when Johnson could get away from Somerset House for an hour or so, ‘on important business,’ as he said, connected probably with the Red-tape Room or the Sealing-wax Department, he used to go there and sit by the fountain, to allow his mind to relax a little from ‘the cares of office.’

Had they met under any other circumstances, as for instance in a railway carriage, they would not of course have spoken to each other, however long the journey, as Englishmen are not in the habit of doing so ; but as all the surroundings there were equally congenial to them, after they had sat by each other for some weeks they became acquainted, and accident bringing them still closer together, they agreed after a time—as they were then both resident at Bayswater, Johnson having recently removed there from Pimlico—that they would occupy the same rooms ; and so before Archer left London they were chums together.

And their rooms were very well situated, for they were near to those of some artist friends who lived there, and who had also a studio at Notting Hill ; which, well placed in a quiet part, and with a good north light, was jointly occupied by them

and by some St. John's-wood men, Simms and Perrott being of the number; and there were few evenings that Johnson and John Archer did not turn in there, to have a chat amongst 'the paint-pots,' and assist in the fumigation of the room; the smell of paint, as Simms observed, being 'unhealthy.'

Living afterwards in Worcestershire, in the same neighbourhood, they saw a good deal of each other; for even when Johnson went to town for a week or two for a change, and squeezed a lot of colour away at the studio he had there—in the Elm-tree-walk—as an incentive to work while he was amongst his friends in the city, Archer would be sure to be riding over and looking in upon him, for they were great friends and good neighbours, and were well suited to each other.

It had been hinted too of late amongst those who knew them that, if they lived

long enough, they might also become relations, as Archer had a sister, who was tall and shapely, and fair to look upon; and Johnson, as an artist, was not blind to beauty.

And the beauty of Miss Kate Archer came so very near to that ideal type depicted by artists, but so seldom met with, that it was a bad case with Johnson from the first time he saw her; and they did say—that is, the gossips in the village—that when he came and settled there, because ‘the scenery’ was so pretty, they thought that Miss Archer was included in it. And though she was too good-looking for her lady friends to praise her, it was generally conceded that she was ‘really a nice girl,’ who, with lady-like accomplishments, had also a thorough knowledge of home duties, and was as well versed in domestic economy as she was in art and literature, and who therefore,

while able to see to the management of the kitchen, could yet hold her own in the drawing-room.

But not only was she able to do so, but she was sensible enough to be at all times willing to do so whenever she could lend a helping hand there ; for, as her old maiden aunts observed, ‘she has always been brought up properly, my dear, and has no nonsensical pride about her ; so will make a good useful wife for any man.’

And as Johnson was often pottering about there, when she was deep in the mysteries of apple-dumplings, or shelling peas, or feeding fowls, or busy with the butter in the dairy—for though Archer was not a farmer, he had cows and poultry, and grew enough hay for his horses—and as on such occasions she had seldom anything on better than a plain print-dress or a figured muslin, and would look rosy, and could not help looking pretty, the poor

fellow got hit very hard indeed; and, old bachelor as he looked, it was soon evident that he wanted a wife, and he meant to have one.

So, as they all knew he was a determined sort of fellow when he had set his mind on anything, those in the neighbourhood began to look very knowing, and said they would 'make a match of it.' And they hoped it would be so, for Johnson was a fine tall fellow, with a frank face and a big beard, and the people about there thought a good deal of him, and liked him; for he used to sketch their little ones, and gossip with themselves; and whenever he had a chance of doing good amongst them—the poorer portion—he did not miss it.

For he was old-fashioned enough to remember that kind words and sympathy are acceptable, if even you have not spare cash about you; and though they cost nothing to the giver, they are often worth a good

deal to the receiver; and that when it is so easy to do good, and to give pleasure to those who need it, it is a wrong thing and a selfish thing, and a pity too, if you do not do it, if only to get into that belief that people who exercise it do get into, that, take it altogether, the world is not such a very bad world after all; only much of the good that is in it lies below the surface, and is seldom met with till you look for it.

‘That seems to be a good bit you are doing there,’ said Archer, getting up and looking at the canvas Johnson was at work at.

‘It will be, I hope,’ was the reply, ‘when I have finished it, and I have got all the high lights in. How about this one, Archie?’ said Johnson, taking the picture off the easel, and putting on to it a partly-finished one that was face to the wall on the floor. ‘That foreground bothers me; I always fail there in force or colour, or

some confounded thing or other,' said he, pointing with his mahl-stick to some foreground detail. 'I think it needs fresh eyes on it, for mine are tiring.'

'Well, you are the best judge,' said Archer, 'but I fancy it wants light.'

'But how will you get it with those rain-clouds over? The picture, as you see, is "Storm clearing off."'

'Just so,' said Archer; 'then clear the clouds by rifting them still more, so as to show the sky behind and get the blue reflected in the water.'

'You are right,' said Johnson. 'A streak of emerald, please, there by your hand, to tone the blue and take the crudeness out, and I will scumble some in here; it will improve it. There,' said he, as he did so; 'that, then, is about it. One change makes others, Archie. I shall have now to alter the colours of these cows. I think red, black, and dun will suit them best. What say you?'

‘Try it inside the blue there, on the palette; here are the tubes.’

‘Thanks; only just a squeeze. I see,’ said Johnson. ‘Yes, that is just the thing; just what was wanted. The colour in the water forces them and brings them out.’

‘A gleam of light too in that left-hand corner would help your distance, and make those hills recede a mile or more; at least, I think so.’

‘It would,’ said Johnson. ‘Give me the megilp. Well, what did you do out yesterday? Was Collins with you?’

‘O yes,’ said Archer; ‘the immortal Fred was there in fullest force, and on the chestnut, but only through the first run that we had, and scarcely that, for, falling at a brook, he lamed his horse; so he got disgusted and then turned for home. I landed,’ Archer said, ‘and as hounds were making for a wildish country, I left him at it.’

‘Settle alongside, Archie, in this chair; then I can paint and listen. Now fire away,’ said Johnson, ‘and tell me what you met with worth the seeing—effects and good bits suitable for canvas, and all about them; in case, from laziness or stress of weather, I get hard up for them, too idle maybe to turn out and search. What you describe I see,’ said Johnson; ‘and cloud effects and scenes as named by you have come in usefully in views I have commenced but never finished, until short of subject maybe in the winter, when I “cook” them up a bit by composition. A shocking plan, you’ll say; but then I am lazy, or rather, Archie, I begin too many and only finish a few of them; and so, when I come upon them long afterwards, I touch and touch until I make them up. They are hybrid pictures, and for practice only. All those I sell are finished for the most part in the open; and so ought all to be. I am never satisfied with what I

do,' said Johnson; 'and so, you see, I get into bad habits.'

'Just so,' said Archer; 'then paint the fewer, and finish as you do them, and put a check on your designing talent. It is all very well, you know, for a book illustrator; but for my part,' said he, 'one good picture painted on the spot is worth a score of those pretty fancies, as you would find, old man, if you had to get your living by it.'

'Yes,' said Johnson, 'I am quite aware of it, and I know it is a very bad propensity; but it is my unfortunate habit of drawing odds and ends that gets me into it. Come, let that dog alone now, and settle down a bit—poor Tiney!—and tell me about yesterday, and what you did.'

'Very well,' said Archer, ceasing to munch Tiney; 'anything for a quiet life, old fellow. After you, Johnson, with the light—thanks. Where we met, then,' said he,

‘was at the Manor Wood, and I went to Fred’s place the overnight by train, so as to get away as early as possible the next morning, to give us time to look round at the country. Do you know it?’

‘No; only by Vernon’s picture, that with the sweep of hills and woodland country; the one that he sold so well straight off the easel. You must remember it,’ said Johnson.

‘A. L.?’ said Archer.

‘No; by W. H.,’ said he. ‘Where the autumn leaves are fluttering from the trees, and the foreground is splashed with the colour of them, in amongst the ferns and brambles, and where you have such a splendid bit of blue and purple distance, miles up the valley.’

‘I think,’ replied Archer, ‘I know the one you mean, though he has painted several pictures of the valley and the woods about there, and the old lanes at the back of them,

that, bowered over as they are, get so gloriously russet, when their banks are littered with leaves and their ruts matted with the mass of them, and when the only greens in them are those jolly velvet mosses, that serve,' said he, 'when a fellow has the object of his small affections by him, Johnson, as a cosy cushioned seat at the foot of a gray oak, while he wrestles with opportunity at the sight of the upturned lips of the loved one, as she is looking for the bees in the ivy blossoms; at least, she tries to make him think so.'

' Does she?' said Johnson, as he strengthened the light to make the hills recede, and stopped out a bit of blue that he found tell too strongly. ' I can hear you have been through it, old fellow. Ah, I have myself noticed,' said he, ' when I have been out sketching in some of the old quiet lanes like those you speak of, where the banks are high and the roots of the trees come out of

them, how singular it is that, where those roots run about the road, there should so often be dots on the one side of them and scores on the other—just as though a parasol and a walking-stick had been there side by side. Something to do, perhaps, with the bees in the ivy-blossoms.'

'I should not wonder,' said Archer; 'but I will ask old Vernon, as he wanders about the lanes a good deal, fixing their beauties on the canvas.'

'Well, if he does not "cook" his sketches, it is a fine bit of country out there, certainly,' said Johnson.

'He never "cooks,"' said Archer, 'for I have been with him; we leave all that to you. He paints all on the spot, like Millais and Leader, and Vicat Cole and Hulme; and he is therefore, as they are, always true to nature, as you may see,' said he, 'in every one he does. They are full of atmosphere—nice breezy-looking pictures, in fact, with

some wind in them, that seems to bend the grass and to stir the water, and to sway the branches about as the leaves blow on them.'

'Yes; I know them,' said Johnson. 'They are good pictures, and in good keeping; and, with their broad cloud-shadows and their moving clouds, they have a true out-door look about them that is very natural. I believe he is out in all weather for effects, and only works from studies in the worst of the winter; and a good plan too,' said Johnson, 'though I don't practise it.'





CHAPTER VIII.

AUTUMN TINTS AND WOODLAND SCENERY.

‘I CANNOT myself stand the cold,’ continued Johnson, stepping back a bit to see how the sky was coming, now he had got the light in, ‘unless I am in exercise, and then I don’t care how cold it is; and though I do sell a few canvases occasionally to friends who want them, and exhibit a bit for the say-so, as a sop to one’s vanity, Archie, and for self-glorification, still, as I can manage without doing so, I can afford to play with it, and sketch, compose, or paint just as I have a fancy for it. All in that book there by you,’ said he, ‘are composition sketches, designs, I may say—I have rather a weakness that way, as you know, Archie—from

odd things you have told me one time or other, hunting incidents, and bits of scenery, and different effects that you have thought worth notice as you have come across them when you have been out with the hounds. What is your woodland bit, as good as Vernon's?"

'Yes,' said Archer; 'better in some respects, as embracing more; as the wood we met at lies upon a hill, and you have from there a long look up the valley as well as over it, with its rich flat meadow-land and its hop-yards and orchards, that edge up the hills from the river. And between the little coppices and covers that lie in the hollows, you get,' said he, 'strips of sheep pasture and gullies, where the deep drips that come down through the big woods, and line them with shadows, widen out into the valley, and empty their rills into the brooks and the river.'

'Good for some sketching?' said Johnson.

‘Yes, very good,’ was the reply. ‘I saw many bits,’ said Archer, ‘that would come well; but none better than from the wood, where there was a good foreground of briers and bracken, and some famous ragged turf with some grays and browns about it, a width of it, and some sheep there, nibbling at the soft green turf that was by it, where the hill sloped down to the dingles. Talk of ferns, old fellow,’ said Archer—‘well, you know those that were in that “Summer Noon” that was in the Academy, where in the left-hand corner of the picture you got that glorious reflected light through the taller ones—quite liquid colour—that ran about the moss the ferns came out of, like the lights that flicker about a garden walk. I saw lots of it there, splendid! All down the sides and shoulder of the hill the turf is covered with ferns, so high and strong that they scrape your boots,’ said he, ‘as you ride through

them; and as they are just now turning from gold to russet, you may fancy their colour where the light comes through them! The greens too were magnificent; sloping to wooded hollows and ravines. I wish you had been there,' said Archer; 'such great grand masses, all autumn-tinted, growing above an underwood waist-deep in ferns, and shadowed by big boughs, that looked as if they were the growth of years, and had sheltered them for a century. And in an open glade between the trees, where it was sunny, there were some figures—women at a spring, and children blackberrying—that, as they moved about, gave useful colour and nice contrasting form just where it was wanted.'

'Good distance?' said Johnson.

'Yes; and mid-distance. Judge for yourself. I call it so,' said Archer. 'A level country lying between hills, high, vast, and wooded; with farms and home-

steads, and with ricks and cottages; and a gray river that was willow-fringed, and showed white at the weirs, where it tumbled over by the mills, and white again on the fords, where the sun caught it as it wound lazily along over the blue of the shallows, and the indigo-green of the woods, rippling along to the steel-tint below it, where it was in shadow from a rain-cloud. And beyond it,' continued Archer, 'were purple breadths of heath and yellow stubbles, and ruddy-looking fields above the meadows, with teams at plough there, and with wreaths of smoke drifting across them from some burning weeds.'

'Scutch, probably,' said Johnson; 'it gives those long low trails that are so useful. A good mid-distance for a picture, Archie.'

'Yes; but the hilly distance was still finer,' said Archer, 'swept as it was by cloud-shadows, from a rainy sky far up the

valley, where the hills, range on range, rose into the darkness of it, and closed the view. The distance citywards was also good, fine indeed, as I saw it,' said he, 'under an atmosphere that blued it over and softened it, and that gave a nice mistiness to the tall poplars and the square clumps that led the eye on to the hamlets and the villages and the city; where the high spire and the cathedral tower pierced the pall of smoke that lay there. And beyond it,' said Archer, 'was haze, then hills, a long and lofty range that was varied in outline, and deep blue in the hollows, and sunlit at the top, the lights shifting as we looked, and fronting a still further range, high too and wooded, that melted into distance miles away, under a sky all thin blue-gray and cloudless.'

'By Jove,' cried Johnson, 'what a place for pictures!'

'I thought you would say so,' said Ar-

cher. ‘We will go there, old fellow, when the warm days come in spring, and then you can paint a bit while I pick primroses. The woods all round there are full of them, and the paths are bordered with their yellow blooms, which, mixed as they are with the blue and white of the violets and the wild hyacinths, the woods then are certainly worth seeing, I can tell you,’ said Archer.

‘I will try a picture there,’ said Johnson, ‘“The Woods in Spring.”’

‘They are worth it,’ replied Archer, ‘as you will say when you see them. Well, from this wood we went away directly and straight for our country, as good luck would have it, as the Manor Wood is the boundary of the Hunt, a neutral cover, and we reached the Rough at the bottom,’ said Archer, ‘and ran through it, many of us having to lead over there, for there were nasty bits about, and thence to Cruckstone Gorse—a

holding place, Johnson, where a second fox was moved and the pack divided, and so split the horsemen. Will, however,' said he, 'with some difficulty got the hounds together again, and cantering on, he laid them on the line. Hunting it every inch for half a mile, they owned it with a burst, then went away straight across country up to Quatford Top, where he soon was viewed, tearing along a grass piece three fields on. But as the pace, as you may suppose, was now too good for breathing-time, the potterers were thrown out; so that it gave the hounds a chance, and cleared the way for those who meant to go. For the next three miles or so,' said Archer, 'Fred and I had our fences together, neither of our horses making one mistake—he rode the chestnut, I was on the bay—until we got the brook, a clipper—Barford Brook, which, as it is bushed by withies nearly all the way, requires some doing, and throws you out of

stride. I always like water on the swing,' said he, 'as the pace lands you ; but when you have to turn your horse about, Johnson, and pound him at it, he knows what's coming, and will then refuse, unless he is a water-jumper. I got it just right,' said Archer, 'straight between the trees; but the chestnut mare would not have it, so Fred got stuck. However, by dint of spur he at last got her over, but, dropping soft, she fell, and when he got her up he found her lame—wrenched, I expect,' said Archer. 'So, as I said, he left, and I went on. But it lost me time,' said he, 'and the hounds were at check when I reached them. Will tried back and cast round, but it was all of no use; so making sure that the fox had gone to ground in some unstopped earths a little farther on, they fixed to draw afresh rather than wait and dig.'

'And where did you go to then?' said Johnson.

‘To Grantham Woods,’ said Archer; ‘a splendid country, and a fox for certain. George Brooks, our break-neck rider, rode up then—you know him, Johnson. “Are you for Grantham, John?” said he. “I am,” I said. “I shall not go, for one,” said George; “they’ll never find.” “We found the last time,” I replied, “when it was a fixture.” “Yes,” said he, “that you might do when you meet there, but not, John, when you come there from another quarter. Leadenhall-market is well-known to all, and so are its foxes! What was your run last time?” said George, “a straight and good one? Hang such old ringers dodging round the cover; their stiffened limbs know not an inch of country! When next you chop there—‘chop’ is the word,” said he, “for there is no run in them—get, if you can, the handling of his carcass; if you don’t find, on roughing-up his coat, seeds from the chaff-bag, why, John, I’m a

Dutchman! A bagman I can swear to anywhere," said George, "and so can hounds, who will turn their noses up and scarcely eat him. If I go hunting, let it be for something; none of your galloping about the rides," said he, "with spurts into a neighbouring field or two, but straight away, the country stiff and strong, and with fences big enough to weed the ruck, and give us room to move—hounds room to go. I am not a tailor-swell," said he, "to join a meet for well-cut coat, neat cords, and natty boots, and at the first stiff bit we get sneak home again. Meaning to go, John, give me the chance to find, and I will ride a distance; but here," said he, "there's none; so I shall save my mare and save my time. But I am keeping you, I see; they are on the move. Great luck, old boy! If you should win the brush, just shake the seeds out!" And so he left.'

‘Then do they,’ Johnson said, ‘have bagmen there?’

‘Bagmen!’ said Archer, ‘no; nor did they ever have them; but George likes pace, and when he does not get it, “Bag fox!” cries he. It’s laughable.’

‘You don’t go with the old squire’s harriers, do you?’ said Johnson, throwing his dun cow slightly into shadow to tally with the rain-cloud overhead.

‘Sometimes,’ said Archer, ‘as it is a first-rate pack and he is a good fellow, that is if I have a young horse that I want to teach, or if the meet is far; though to my thinking that “thistle-whipping” is a tame affair, though I don’t mind a by-day now and then with them, Johnson, when—say in March—some old jack hares will go as straight as foxes. We had a very straight thing from the Hall meadows last season, but, as a rule, it’s ring, ring, ring all day, and pick and choose at every fence you

come to; still you do see all the hunting, but with foxhounds the pace prevents it. But I like a swing and pace,' said he; 'not time to look—a run that makes you, Johnson, if you are to see it, go straight as pigeons and as swift as swallows; that gets your steam up and well warms your blood, and rouses all the mettle that is in you—you and your horse! That is the sort of hunting,' said Archer, 'that I like, old man. With hounds like ours, that can fly their fences and spring like greyhounds, it is sport indeed!'

'Was Palmer out?' said Johnson.

'Yes, he was,' said Archer, 'along with Causer, and well-mounted too, on a rare good-looking one, that champed his bit and flung his flakes of foam while trotting on the turf beside the hounds, bringing his legs well under him at every stride. A small and well-bred head and good bang tail, set on just as it should be—a nice

horse altogether,' said he, 'and a fencer, that pricks his ears as he nears the leap, just like a hunter, and lets his rider pull him well together. I saw him do some rails,' said Archer, 'in first-rate style, most clean and steady—some four-barred ox-rails, five feet high at least, and nearly six if taken at the uprights—three to a length—so close together, and with no "give" in them! Were not the price a long one, I should buy him—three fifties, for I asked it, and he is cheap at the money,' said Archer. 'However, I must be content, for my last purchase—that brown horse—carries me splendidly. Wells tried him when I was up there, and liked him too. He is a good horse, Johnson.'

'And what has Causer now?' said Johnson. 'He seldom mounts well.'

'O, nothing much,' was the reply. 'A slashing-looking one, but middling pace—a soft one, I think,' said Archer, 'for he was

soon pumped out in that run on the plough the other day. I doubt his judgment.'

'There then, Archie, I think that comes better,' said Johnson, looking with his head aside at the blue bits he had scumbled in the picture, rifting the sky, and so improving it. 'What as to Grantham?' said he; 'what sort of a country is it?'

'O, beautiful!' was the reply; 'all hill and dale, with great woods that are scored by ravines, and with old quarries and gullies in them, and lots of tumbling water. One dell, or rather a deep glen, that we rode through was very fine; the hills rising on either side of it to a great height, and cutting the sky with their greensward, green to the top of them.'

'But we did not find there,' said he, 'though the hounds drew through it carefully; so we went on down into the dingle, a most tangled place, and there, picking our way over the broken ground and the

brushwood, and poking about through the gorse and ling, and under the sprays and boughs, we found a wide brook that was brawling through the bottom, and dashing its foaming flakes on boulder stones, and on great rough slabs that had been washed down there from the quarries by the floods in the winter. A famous bit for a picture, Johnson,' said he, 'and full of colour; for just above the brook there was a mass of red rock that jutted into it, and that was stained with some old gray moss and lichens, and half-shadowed by the long purple sprays of the boughs that hung over it.

'And ferns sloped up from it,' said Archer, 'banks of them; most glorious ones, Johnson, growing luxuriantly, and shoulder high, in all the beauty of their autumn tints; most splendid studies! And up still higher, and nearly black—so deep was the green of it—was a wide-spread backing of some grand old yews, edged with

the berries of the mountain-ash, that hung in tangles there, with feathery birch.

‘Then, as we went onwards,’ said he, ‘we found a landslip that had pushed the brook out and turned its course, and so made a waterfall. A fine point as we saw it,’ said Archer, ‘with a rift of blue sky high up through the trees, over the white of it. And riding behind the hounds for some distance along the brook, we saw lots of material and any quantity of good things, passing great dock-leaves, both cup-like and spread out, the very things, old man,’ said he, ‘for foregrounds for you, whole beds of them, by pebbly shallows, and lots of hemlock that was grown to a giant size, and water-herbage. Rare studies, Johnson.

‘We will go there some time with the blocks and sketch them; they are very fine. We also passed by many calm still pools,’ said Archer, ‘out of the current, where the banks had burst; and in their

bottle-greens and browns, beneath the reflections of the bladed grass, were speckled trout, that made us long to stay a bit and fish there.'

'Well, let us go there some day soon,' said Johnson.

'We will,' said Archer. 'After a mile or so of watery-way, that cooled the horses' feet and made hounds fresher, a narrow pathway coming from the top ran by the brook, and so gave elbow-room, which we were glad of, as it saved us pressing the boughs back as we went along there, which we all had to do all up the brook, it was so overgrown. Being thus able to push along a bit, we quickened our horses' pace, and went on through the glen to the end of it, the hounds "drawing blank," the road, as we made our way there, getting darker,' said Archer, 'from some dense plantations of firs, beech, and oak.

'Turning a corner, under hanging trees,

a burst of light disclosed a lengthy meadow, bright-green and sunny, sloping down gently to the valley under, and brightened by the scarlet of the coats and by the dappled hounds then trotting over it—a picture, Johnson.'

‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘Well, how does mine come now?’

‘O, very well,’ said Archer, looking at it. ‘It is much improved. I see you have “stopped” that light; it is all the better for it.’

‘Well, while we watched the long cloud-shadows,’ continued Archer, ‘that were stealing slowly across from where the shadows of the glen fell on the meadow, and saw the lighter shades float on over the darker ones, to blot out, as they went, bright bits of colour, spotting the green with gray, a shout of “Gone away!” and sound of horn, changed all our thoughts to the huntsman and the hounds.’

‘You found at last, then?’ said Johnson.

‘We did,’ said Archer. ‘A man out ploughing there beyond the meadow had seen a fox steal quietly away; so as we came in sight he signalled to us. So Warne at once,’ said he, ‘galloped with cap in hand to where he stood, cheering the hounds on as he went along.

“I seed him,” said the fellow, “cross that field theer, and go by that big oak through that theer hedge, making for them big covers on the hill. He’s twenty minutes gone.” “Was it a sheep-dog that you saw?” said Will. “It warn’t,” said he. “I’d know a fox from ship-dog any day. I’se seed ‘em often; you git your hounds on if you want to catch him, for when he passed he looked as fresh as paynt.” So on we went,’ said Archer.

‘As the ground was moister there, seemingly from rain that had not reached us, the

hounds soon had their noses down and owned the scent, which, as it mended on the grass lands, it dropped the pickers,' said he, 'for it gave us pace. The way hounds went,' said Archer, 'looked so like a kill, that each man rode as if he booked the brush. Through wood and thicket, and prickly gorse and copse, the pack were so resolute that they dashed on without a pause, and raced mile after mile over turf and fallow-field.

'At last,' said he, 'they viewed him making for some sheep under a hedgerow, where they were huddled up together. With one wild scream from Will to spur them on, they lengthened out and strained their very hearts, good hounds, to kill him.

'In three more fields they flung themselves upon him, and rolled him over down into the ditch.

'A fifty-minutes' run—five up—I one,' said Archer. 'A right good fox!—no

“bagman” that is certain ; so George, you see, was “out” for once, old man.

‘So there’s chapter and verse for you,’ said Archer ; ‘so shut up the painting now, Johnson, there’s a good fellow, and let us have a row on the river. We will go across the racecourse to the ferry, and take a boat from there. It is a jolly day, and we shall enjoy it.’

‘Well, wait ten minutes,’ said Johnson, ‘and I will be with you ; and then we will pull up to Holt and have a look at the swans.’

‘Agreed, old man ; so stir yourself,’ said Archer.





CHAPTER IX.

A GHOST IN THE OPEN—GRIFFIN IN THE GRIP.

‘Who was the new man you were talking to to-day, Dawson? The fellow goes well.’

‘The one on the bay do you mean?’

‘Yes, a sharp-looking little customer, who seems to have all his eye-teeth about him.’

‘O, that was “little Jemmy,” to be sure, Jemmy Griffin; a very old friend of mine, and once a neighbour.’

‘What, did he ever live in these diggings?’

‘Yes, for two or three years; but it was before your time. You had not come here then; and he is now on a visit at Beekley. He is coming here, by the bye,

to-morrow, Fred ; and if you will come too, and help us out with a hare and a brace of birds, at four sharp, you will find him, I think, a very decent fellow.'

'Thanks,' said King ; 'he is good across country, that's certain.'

'Yes, he is,' said Dawson ; 'but when I first knew him, he was as great a "tailor" as you ever saw, and had positively no hands or seat.'

The speakers were young Harry Dawson, gentleman farmer, and Fred King, gentleman at large, the only son of a wealthy landowner, by whom he had been indulged from quite a boy, and who still gave him nearly all he asked for ; the locality, the interior of an old manor-house—Dyneley Court—in Herefordshire ; and the time, the evening of a hunting day in November, when King, who lived near there, at the Pool House, and who often looked-in in the evening for a gossip, and .

had been out that day with Dawson, settled himself in an easy-chair before the fire, and talked of the day's "run," and kindred topics.

'Who put him in the way of it?' said he.

'Well, in a measure, I did,' said Dawson; 'for, as I could not,' said he, 'ride with a fellow in that form, I just "grassed" him —a few soft ones, Fred, and one rattler—to get his hands down, and fit him to the pigskin, and he has gone very fairly ever since. We met in rather an odd sort of way. I don't know if ever I told you of it?'

'I think not,' said King; 'the name seems new to me.'

'It was when the governor was alive,' said Dawson; 'one day somewhere about this time five or six years ago. I know we were busy wheat-sowing. We had the hounds here. They brought a fox from Cherwood, one of our outlying fixtures, as I think you know, Fred, and crossed the

water, and ran him up the meadows and over the plough and through the orchards, and away for Hampton. We watched them—for being busy I had not,’ said Dawson, ‘been with them—out of hearing and over the hills, when, “Harry lad,” says the governor, “just go round the fences, will you, and look them over; and Jem here shall take some trous and hetherings to fill the gaps, if you find that there are any; and count the sheep again as you come back. There may be some strayed if they have left the gates open.” So I went,’ said Dawson. ‘Well, Fred,’ said he, ‘scarcely was I out of sight of the old man—in fact, I was but just past the sawpit—when I heard a most awful howling and scream on scream. Knowing that Jane Callow’s youngsters were out that way, getting in some fern we had cut for her for litter, I hurried on, thinking they had got a snake, or a snake had got them—there are lots on the com-

mon, you know, and in those hedges—and that there was no time to lose; so getting over the gate into Perryfield, and making for the noise, there the children were,' said Dawson, 'sure enough, cowering under the hedge and screaming lustily. "What is the matter with you?" I said, "you young varmints!"' continued Dawson. "'What are you making that noise for? You will frighten the whole parish!" "O, sir; please, sir; the ghost, sir!" was the sobbing reply, given in the native dialect, which, as you know it too well, Fred, I will not,' said he, 'inflict upon you; "it's there, sir; in the hedge, sir; please, sir"—sob, sob. Looking where they pointed, there certainly was something white there—orthodox colour for ghosts, I thought,' said Dawson; 'and also on the move, as though the apparition had its back up, and was stealing along the hedgerow to get away unnoticed. Quieting the miserable little imps, I went towards it,'

said he, 'and there, in the corner, caught in the brambles, was some light-coloured garment, bulged by the wind and surging in the breeze. Bending forward to hook it up, the confounded thing gave a groan, and then a second, more piteous than the first.'

'The deuce it did!' said Fred, as he looked rather wild about the eyes.

'Fact,' said Dawson. 'Now I am not a nervous man myself, Fred; but I must say I did not then wonder at the youngsters' noise, especially when, amidst some more unearthly sounds, I heard—now don't get nervous, old fellow; I see your hair is beginning to rise—right under my very feet, and below the ground, and said in the most sepulchral tones possible—steady, Fred, it's coming—very sepulchral indeed, Fred—the stern command to "Get me out; get me out!"'

'By Jove!' said King.

‘Well, here was a fix,’ said Dawson. ‘Who was “me,” ghost or human? Jumping over the cutting on to the bank, I peered into the next field. Nothing there; looked all round—still nothing; yet the groaning and the moaning continued. Thinking, all at once,’ said he, ‘it might be that fool of a fellow Biscoe “on for a lark,” I sang out—O, you need not think I was frightened, Fred,’ said Dawson—“Come, Master Jemmy, you get out of that, or I will make you; none of your nonsense, you great stupid!” “But I cannot get out,” was the reply. “Is it really you, Jemmy?” I said, scarcely recognising his voice, and thinking,’ continued Dawson, ‘I had seen him down in the hop-yard before I started. “Yes, it is,” was the reply. “Are you sure?” said I. “Did your godfathers and godmothers give you that name?” “Yes, yes, I tell you, I am Jemmy; and as you seem to know me, why do you let me lie here un-

derground? I am in a coffin; a perfect coffin.”

‘What did you think when he said that —“in a coffin”? said King, as he felt his scalp creep.

‘Why, with no Jemmy to be seen above ground, to tell you the truth,’ said Dawson, ‘I did not know what to think. Accident, however,’ said he, ‘soon solved the mystery, luckily for Jemmy; for in jumping back off the bank I stumbled,’ said Dawson, ‘and, pitching forward, fell into the field, with my legs hanging over the cutting. “Let me catch hold of your legs,” said a voice under me—just fancy, Fred, right under me.’

‘By Jove!’ said King again.

‘“No you don’t,” said I, as I whisked them out; “not if I know it;” and up I scrambled,’ said Dawson. ‘But to make a long story short,’ said he, ‘continued moanings and groanings induced me, after again

listening, to push the briars aside—they had been pressed down by something—and to look into the cutting; and there at the bottom of it lay, cruddled up, not a veritable “ghost,” but an apparition of flesh and blood.

“Why, how in the name of all that is horrible did you get there?” I cried with astonishment.

“I was thrown here,” was the reply.

“Who threw you here?” I asked.

“Charley.”

“What Charley?” said I.

“Old Charley.”

“And where is he gone, the rascal?”

“Over the hedge—he jumped it.”

“How long ago?” I inquired. “Perhaps we may catch him.”

“O, half an hour or more,” was the reply; “it must be, I know.”

“The scoundrel,” I muttered, as I thought,’ said Dawson, ‘of our one rural

policeman, Timmings, and the propriety of at once sending for him. "What could have been his motive?"

"O, he wanted to get rid of me, I suppose."

"So it seems," I said. "However, the first thing to be done is to get you out of this, and to see to you, and then we will try if we cannot run him down. It is impossible," said I, continued Dawson, "that he can have got away far by this time. I will soon have you out, old fellow, when I can get this pole from the hedge for you to hold by."

"I fear he has," was the remark; "for he went off on the gallop."

"Did you say 'gallop'?" I asked, utterly astonished. "O yes, I see," said I, "an idiom for pace. How shall we know him if we come up with him?"

"He has a white mark down the face," was the reply; "a blaze."

“Just so,” I said. Another idiom, I thought, for burn. It leaves a white mark,’ said Dawson, ‘as you see, Fred, by my hand; that is seamed from a burn I had three years ago.

“And a stripe down the shoulder.”

“Ah! where you hit him,” I remarked.

“No,” said he, “where he was hurt when a colt.”

“O yes, very good; when he was a youngster, you mean,” I said, laughing. “A provincialism.”

“Yes, when he was a youngster—a two-year old.”

“And what else,” I asked, “has he, that we shall know him by if we catch him?”

“A big bang tail,” said he.

“Why, what on earth are you talking about?” I said. Poor fellow! Slight concussion and wandering; evidently hit no the head, thought I. This must be seen to. “Confound the pole, will it never come

out?" I said, as I kept on trying,' said Dawson, 'to drag it from the hedge to help him out with it.

"Hi, you frightened brats!" I shouted to the youngsters, who were too terrified,' said he, 'to quit the field without me; "cut away this minute and be off up to the house; now quick, and bring the men. A man in the grip, tell them, and to bring some picks—and hi, here! a ladder too. Now don't forget the ladder! Run all the way. He is off his head," I muttered, "clear enough. 'A big bang tail,' indeed. 'Old Charley' with 'a tail!' That is good, though."

"I shall be off my head very soon if you don't hurry," said he. "Confound it all, I mean my horse, old Charley—why, lots know Charley!"

"O-o-o!" I almost whistled, "I see where you are now. You were one with the hounds, then, across here just now?"

“Of course I was,” said he.

“And have come to grief?” I said.

“Can’t you see I have?” said he.

“Yes, yes, of course. How very stupid! I wonder I did not see it,” I replied.

“I wonder too,” said he; “but get me out, and we’ll talk afterwards. I can’t be in this form much longer.”

“Are you hurt?” I asked, said Dawson.

“I think so,” he said, “for I am in great pain; but I am so wedged in here and doubled up, I cannot tell what is the matter with me till I feel my feet a bit.”

“What a situation for him to have been in!” said King.

“It was,” said Dawson. “Well, cheer up, old fellow,” I said, continued Dawson, “and we will soon have you out of it now;” for I could find the long fir-pole I had been tugging at—put there, Fred, to bar the cattle—was giving, and I should soon have it. “Here!” I called to him, as

I dragged it out, "try to catch hold of this, will you, and I will help you up with it?" And with that I passed it down into the grip—one of our backwater cuttings, Fred, that is straight and narrow, and eight feet deep at least—a "grip" to him. But it was of no use,' said Dawson, 'for I found that the least exertion was too much for him; and I at once saw that he was badly hurt. "Never mind," said I, "old man. Keep quiet; we will try again directly. I have sent up to the house, and the men are coming. All right, here they are," I said. "They are only two fields off, so they won't be long; and I see they have a ladder and some picks with them. You won't be there much longer, that's one comfort."

"It is indeed," he said; "for I have been here long enough, I think. It is a blessing you found me."

'But the ladder,' said Dawson, 'we found useless; so we went to work at once

and dug down to him, taking a slant from six feet off or so, right to the bottom of the cutting. The thing then,' said he, 'was how we should get him up the slant, now that we had cut it. However, we solved that difficulty by digging round him, just for elbow-room, and then working upwards, making the slope into steps by ridging it. And so,' said Dawson, 'we landed him, and let him lie a while to get his breath, and gave him a drop of brandy, that he said we should find in a flask in his pocket, as he had once saved a man's life in the hunting-field through having it; so since then he had never come out with the hounds without it.'

'How was that?' said King.

'I did not ask him then,' said Dawson; 'but he told me afterwards—one day after he had got about again. A fellow got sent against a tree when hounds were in cover; and he got such a whack on the heart

through it that it knocked the wind out of him, and nearly settled him, and “Jemmy” brought him to with the brandy.’

‘A capital thing for emergencies,’ said King; ‘but, like fire,’ said he, ‘though a good friend, it is a bad enemy.’

‘So the doctor remarked,’ said Dawson, ‘and that it was a pity people would not see it in that light. It would not have helped Jemmy there though he had it; for he was too closely wedged to get at it. But when we did get him out it was of use to him. And then,’ continued Dawson, ‘when his faint was over, we hoisted him—four of us—on our shoulders, and carried him gently to the house. And after he had come round, and we were able to let him talk a bit, we learned his name, and found he was the person who had taken Lingens—Lingens it was at that time, at least; but he altered the name of it to The Sycamores. You know it,’ said he, ‘by

the cover; and he was then over seeing to repairs and improvements.

‘And he soon,’ said Dawson, ‘altered the look of the place; and people about there said, “That new man, Griffin, seems to have some taste;” and so he had,’ said he. ‘The wood-yard that was at the side of the house he put behind, and made in its place a lawn and croquet-ground, and where there was a duck-pond that was greened all over beneath the windows, he soon had sloping turf and flower-beds; and what with filling here and cutting there, he made a pretty garden round the house; and by judicious thinning of the trees about it, he got some peeps of blue distance through them, and glimpses of the river in the meadows. The moat,’ said Dawson, ‘he also filled up, and made a drive there, turning the water through the back of the shrubbery—where it was planted out—and dropping it down through

the garden, over some ledges edged with ferns and rockery, and then cutting away the fence at the end there, he tumbled it over into the old quarry, and so got a waterfall, that with its picturesque surroundings of red rock, and broom and gorse, and hanging bushes, made a nice point, and came well as you looked up at it from the rustic bridge that he threw over from the bottom of the grounds to the ash-bed, where the stream flowed away to the river through the dell and the dingle, where he had winding walks and seats; and a most jolly place it was too on a summer evening,' said Dawson, 'as you may suppose, Fred.'

'I should think so,' said King, 'but I have never been there, though I have often passed it and noticed the outbuildings.'

'Yes,' said Dawson, 'those he dressed up; he edged them all with barge-boards, as you see them, and planted the ivy that

covers them, and topped them with that dovecot.'

'He must have spent a lot of money, then, inside the house and out of it,' said King.

'He did,' said Dawson; 'I wish he could have stayed.'





CHAPTER X.

OLD JOHN, AND HOW IT HAPPENED.

‘WELL, as I was saying,’ resumed Dawson, ‘we got him to the house, and luckily the doctor was at hand, at one of our cottages up the road; killing time there till he was wanted by a workman’s wife, who had sent for him; so that we soon got help.

“Two ribs upon the right, and one on the left side are broken, if not crushed,” said the doctor, after he had examined him; “and he is badly bruised and shaken; he must be kept very quiet, and not talk; and do not let him exert himself in the least, or it may go hard with him. Much depends on that, remember! Give me some annel, please,” said he, “and I will put it

• on as well as I can ; but it must be lightly for the present, until we see what symptoms show themselves.'

"I thought, doctor," said I, continued Dawson, "you always did them up tightly at once; they bound me up pretty tight, I know, when I got a rattler out hunting once."

"I daresay they did," said he, "and so should I do now in this case were I clear about it. Where the fracture is a simple one, straight through, Dawson, it is plain sailing; but the case is different when they are crushed or badly broken, and a tight bandage would only add to the mischief. You see it is this way, Dawson," said he, "unless it is a clean fracture, you get sharp edges; and if you press those sharp edges in upon the lungs, you get inflammation from the irritation of it, and sometimes haemorrhage, that is often fatal; and it is not unlikely, even as it is, that we may get

inflammation in this case; so we will make sure," said the doctor, "as we can soon tighten it if no symptoms occur of any moment. He is to have nothing, mind, but slops, and to be kept quite quiet. I will look in again," said he, "in a few hours, and see how he is."

"So having made him as comfortable as he could," said Dawson, "he went back to the cottage; calling again as he rode by in the evening, when the woman—Mrs. Smith—was able to release him.

"By gom, sir," said Smith, as he brought the news, "it be twins! I dunna know how I shall ever bear it."

"Poor wretch!" said King.

"The doctor found him easier for the mixture—we had started Smith off," said Dawson, "with the prescription, as he was poking in the way—and so he soon left us, repeating what he had said as to slops and quiet. We had sent in the mean time, and

unknown to Griffin, to his mother's place,' said Dawson, 'the Grove, down in the hollow at Deepdale Brook, where Moore now lives; and we had also despatched a man or two to try to find the horse, and bring with them, if they could see it, that white mysterious thing that was caught on the hedge, and which I had quite forgotten and left there; a garment by the bye that proved,' said Dawson, 'to be an old white macintosh, which, coming off as he fell into the grip, got caught by the briars, and lodged there. On the man's return from the Grove,' he continued, 'he found there was no one there but servants, as Mrs. Griffin and her daughters had gone—November being a dull month with us—for three weeks to some friends in Warwickshire—the Flemmings of Kenilworth. As it was of no use,' said he, 'spoiling their pleasure by bringing them home, and as more than servants' care was needed for

him, we with difficulty persuaded him to remain with us, for a few days at least. Begging we would not communicate with his people, his mother having heart-disease, and sending again to the Grove to impress the same upon the servants, he accepted the situation, and was very patient.

‘Poor fellow,’ said Dawson, ‘he had a stiff time of it though ; for inflammation of the lungs did set in, and we had then to write to his friends, as he was very bad with it, and we did not at that time know how it might end. Of course we found them nice people ; a wee-bit old-fashioned,’ said he, ‘but very pleasant and lady-like. When able to be moved with safety, they had him with them ; and from that time to this,’ said Dawson, ‘we have been great friends.’

‘How came he to leave this quarter?’ said King.

‘For one thing,’ said Dawson, ‘the house

was damp; the pool and the moat had been there too long, I expect; and for another, and the main reason, he came into some property by the death of an uncle; and so gave up farming, as being no longer necessary. His mother and sisters, though, still spend part of the year with him, at his place, the Woodend—up for the Ludlow country; and the rest of the year at Bath and Malvern, with a month at the sea in the summer.'

‘Did you capture the animal?’ said King.

‘Yes,’ said Dawson; ‘they found the brute quietly grazing three fields off, with the reins round his legs; and he came with them as gently as a lamb.’

‘Then he was not a vicious wretch?’ said King.

‘O, no,’ was the reply; ‘but an ugly beast with a great coarse head, and an amount of jaw that looked like pulling.

‘Some one who had been kind enough

to tutor Jemmy, had it seems, told him, when he was coming to a big place, to “put the steam on, sit back, loose his head, and let him have it.” He did so,’ said Dawson, ‘and he did “have it;” for mistaking the word “loose,” he so slackened his curb while going a fizzer for the fence, that “Old Charley,” who really could jump, and would have cleared the lot, or have done it “on and off,” was sent with a bang against the bank and turned over into the next piece; Jemmy coming to grief in the process, and falling through the briars into the grip.’

‘I see,’ said King.

‘Had not I found him,’ said Dawson, ‘he might have stayed, ay and remained, there for days; for we were seldom round that corner, as we did not then turn sheep there; and the place itself was so completely covered, by the briars not rising after he went through them, that had he been unable to cry out, we may actually have

passed the place a score of times without seeing him ; and doubled up as he was closely wedged, he could not very well have helped himself.'

'That's certain,' King said.

'Since then, however, we have had many a good day together, and he can now ride, as you have seen,' said Dawson, 'to hounds with any man ; and but for that "ghost" in the open and Griffin in the grip, I should have missed knowing a very jolly fellow, and my sisters a nice family.'

'The memorable garment he still preserves; it hangs in his sanctum, marked "In memoriam," and it certainly was instrumental in saving his life—it was more,' said Dawson, 'it was the cause of it; for had not the wretched thing caught as he fell, no "ghost" would have been seen, no screams heard, and no help given. Case of Q.E.D., old fellow, plain as your hat—hence the relic.'

‘Mary,’ said Dawson, calling to the servant, as he finished telling King all about the ‘ghost,’ ‘is that old John’s voice that I hear out there?’

‘Yes, sir,’ said the girl; ‘he’s been down at the clerk’s, and has just called in, sir.’

‘Then tell him to sit down a bit,’ said Dawson, ‘and draw him some cider, and bring in supper.’

‘Would you like to go out into the kitchen, Fred,’ said he, as they finished supper, ‘and have a chat with the old fellow? He is on the settle there in the chimney-corner. There is a good fire, I see.’

‘Yes, if you like,’ said King.

‘He is quite a character, as you are aware, Fred; and now old Mead is dead, he is the oldest man and “father of the parish.” Come on, then,’ said Dawson, ‘while she clears the things, and we will draw him out a bit.’

‘Well, John,’ said Dawson, as they went

into the kitchen, ‘ and how does the world use you, old man ? You’re late to-night.’

‘ My duty to you, sir,’ said John, getting up and pulling his forelock—his smock-frock as white as snow and his cheeks as rosy as a pippin—‘ O nicely, nicely, thank you, sir. I ates well an’ I sleeps well, an’ I thank the Lord I can take ma drop o’ drink. A taste o’ good stuff this now, Mayster Henry ; clane i’ the mouth. I drinks it to you, gentlemen.’

‘ Thank you, John ; don’t spare it if you like it. And what has Dovey,’ said Dawson, ‘ got to say for himself ?’

‘ A mighty little, sir ; mighty little. I ha’ been a-tacklin’ on him, sir, for racin’ the parson.’

‘ Racing the parson, John ?’

‘ Is, sir, o’ Sundays. I teld him it daynt become him. “ Suppose the poor man,” says I, “ was to trip a word, why you’d be on to him like ’ounds a-huntin’, or maybe head him. To finish afore the parson,” says I,

“ would disgrace the parish.” Not as he’s like the old un, sir, Parson Yaxley, as ood let us sleep all the sarmun, so as we didna snore, an’ in the winter arternoons, if it were a-snowin’, sir, ood send us out a shillin’ apiece fro the court-house, and stop hisself theer over his wine, comfortable-like, for us to goo home paceable, like good Christians, as doin’ on us more good nor a-settin’ to hear him i’ the cold theer. “ But, Dovey,” I says, an’ as “ feyther o’ the parish” I says it, “ he’s our suparior, so respees his due; no sarvant ever rides afore his mayster.” ’

‘ Yes, I have heard say the old rector was much liked,’ said Dawson.

‘ That he were, sir,’ said John; ‘ he were mighty good to me, mighty good; that’s when I were a boy o’ sixteen, sir—a matter o’ sixty year ago now, Mayster Henry, sixty year ago. Well, sir, you know, my mother—rest her soul, poor ooman—claned the church, an’ I helped her, so I were alleys a-

'angin' about theer like; an' o' Sundays, arter we'd turned the cushins up an' put the books i' the proper place—i' the font, sir—a good big un that were, sir, as they could stand 'em up in, not that littler un theyn got now—an' the dusters an' her pattens theer; her other pair, sir, in case o' suddin wet o' Sundays, so as to be per-vided-like; a werry thoughtful ooman were my mother, sir—we alleys left the doore open for the week, to make it sweet and clane and fresh-like for sarvice agin, and then locked the gate, to keep the gipsies out.

'But as the fowls could goo in,' continued old John, 'they did goo in, an' the sheep too for the matter o' that, when they was turned i' the churchyard; so it were my place, you see, sir, to hunt the eggs up, an' bring him all I could find theer, an'—for he did the thing as was right, sir, an' alleys behaved 'ansum to ma, sir—he used

to gie ma a 'apenny apiece all round for 'em, good uns or bad uns.'

'Did you get many, then, in the church?' said King.

'Purty well, sir; purty well,' said old John; 'but if theer'd a bin another pilpit, or one o' them three-deckers, we'd a done better, sir, for they laid eggs on eggs i' the pilpit.'

'I wonder you did not have them come in on Sundays during service,' said King.

'So they did, sir, at one time,' said he, 'an' was alleys welcome; we never meddled ooth 'em, sir, nor mislested 'em; but the clerk as they had then—old Thomas Cobb, as is dead and gone, rest his poor soul—had a misfortin, sir, so they was stopped.'

'What was that, John?' said Dawson.

'Why, you see, sir,' said the old man, 'the parson had been a-lectrin' on him how to gie out the hymns proper-like, and we was to have, o' the next Sunday, "Hark!

the herald," on the bass viol—that were Joe Timmins, and the flageolet, Edwin Purchas—both on 'em gone now, sir, an' their instruments. An' the clerk, Thomas Cobb, as I said, sir, in gieing of 'em out, were to stop at "Hark!" an' not on no accounts to goo on wi' the "herald" till the third "Hark!" so as like to press the congregeration.'

'Impress, John,' suggested Dawson.

'Perhaps it were, sir,' said John. 'Well, when he stood up o' the Sunday, sir, he disturbed one o' them fowls, as had been peaceable-like i' the desk during prayers, and set him a-flyin' on to the cushin, sir, where "Cock-a-doodle-do," says he. "Hark!" cries Cobb—that were his first "Hark!" sir—and looks as wild as two hawks, to think o' the daredness o' the fowl, and under his very nose too, sir. "Cock-a-doodle-do," says the fowl again, as bold as possible, and flapping his wings like a fighter.

“ Hark !” cries Cobb again—that were his second “ Hark !” sir—ficer than ever, when, as I sit here on this here settle, sir, the other fowls jines in, an’ in two minutes, what wi’ the “ chuck-chucks ” an’ the “ doodle-doos,” it were Meg’s delight, sir ; an’ in the middle on it all, sir, while everybody were well-nigh a-bustin’, he roars out, savager than ever—bein’ obligated-like, sir, to goo on wi’ his part—“ Hark ! the herald angels sing ;” an’ then flopped back on to his cushin an’ disappeared ontirely, as the fowls went at it all at once, as if they meant it.’

‘ That was awkward, however, John,’ said Dawson, laughing.

‘ It were, sir,’ said John, who looked very serious ; ‘ for we niver sung it that mornin’, arter all, sir. The viol tried it, and the flageolet tried it, but it ony sounded like both instruments a-laffin, sir ; an’ so the flute an’ the fiddle gid in at that, sir ; an’ then we all laffed, sir, instruments an’

all; an' in the midst on it out o' her pew walks the oud squire's housekeeper, as were brought up religious, sir, an' she went an' jined the Methodies that very evenin', sir, on the Green. "For," says she, "I won't sit theer an' have my religion insulted by a parcel o' fowls in that manner." An' to her dyin' day she would have it, gentlemen both, as how the parson an' the clerk trained them fowls atween 'em; an' that it were all a planned thing to put her about an' fluster her, 'ecos she didna hold good wi' fowls in any way, on account o' their nise an' crowin'; an' was alleys a "drattin'" 'em in an' out o' the church an' about the buildins'. So through the crowin' the fowls was druv, an' I,' said old John, 'lost my 'apence; an' as for her, sir—well, she died a Ranter, as were a judgment on her, through a-slanderin' o' them fowls.'

'I wonder you were not clerk, John,' said King.

‘Well, sir, I niver warn’t no scholard,’ said John, ‘or I could ha’ copt Thomas Cobb, I think, sir; leastways in follerin’ the parson in a devout sort o’ a manner, and at a respectful distance—as I told Dovey, sir, just now. But feyther didna hold good ooth schoolin’. He said he larnt hisself fro’ the Book o’ Natur; but I niver seed it, sir, though I’se heerd folks, that be gentlefolks, a-mentionin’ on it; but it were a pictur-book, I know, sir, ’ecos they spoke o’ “the beauties” in it.’

‘They meant what you see round you, John—the beautiful hills and the woods,’ said Dawson, ‘and the green fields and the river.’

‘Now did they, sir?’ said John, rousing up with astonishment. ‘Ony to think o’ that now! Ay, there be a good maany o’ them things about in this part o’ the country, sir, a good maany.’

‘And the blue sky and the birds, and

the buds and the blossoms,' continued Dawson.

'Well, I holds good ooth the blue sky, Mayster Henry,' said old John, "'ecos that brings the tatars on ; an' I approves o' the blossom too, by reason o' it looking like a lot o' cyder about,' said he; 'but as for them buds and birds, sir, the one takes the t'other, I reckon; leastways them beggarin' sparrers does, sir, as arn't no good to nobody, an' them tomtits. They played the very old un wi' my aperycot this time, sir, an' punished the pays dreadful, athough I'd stringed 'em an' feathered 'em an' old-hatted 'em.'

'Ah, a heartrending case,' said Dawson.
'Hold your cup, John. You won't be afraid of a drop more?'

'Niver were it, sir,' said John.

'Fill it up for him, then, Mary,' said Dawson; 'it won't hurt him. Now, Fred,' said he, 'old John will tell us of his younger days.'

‘A ool, a ool, sir. This be mighty good cyder, Mayster Henry,’ said old John, ‘mighty good.’

‘Drink it up, then,’ said Dawson, ‘and light your pipe, John.’





CHAPTER XI.

BURTON OF BOSCABEL—INTO THE RIVER,
AND DOWN WITH THE FLOOD.

‘THEN you really had a good thing yesterday?’ said Warden to his friend Burton, as the two bachelor chums sat before the fire, on a chill November evening, in Warden’s old-fashioned room at the Manor House, which was a straggling sort of place, half ivy, and situated in the midst of the hunting covers in Herefordshire, and in the hamlet of Deepdale.

‘First-rate, Fred,’ was the reply; ‘for they are low-scented hounds, and they suit the woodlands; so if a fox is out, and there is anything like a scent, we are sure of sport.’

Warden, who was a friend of Burton, was a young fellow of good family and of fair means; the farm that was attached to the Manor House being a dairy-farm, that gave grazing ground to a large herd of milking cows, hence the cheese and the butter-making there were items of importance; and it was a poultry-farm also, as ready a sale being found in the county town for eggs and chickens, and such-like, as in most places.

The poultry and the pigeon house and the dairy were in a nice cool place by themselves, in a snug part of the shrubbery, and each had an enclosure of its own; and their little ornamental buildings were surrounded by trees, and belted with rhododendrons, crimson and scarlet, that, when they were flushed with colour in the summer, looked well with the white pigeons about them. And the butterwomen, Jane and Martha, went to market twice a week, and in the

old-fashioned way too—on horseback, with their butter-bags—the cheese and the poultry being always sent on by the carrier.

The two friends, Warden and Burton, lived in adjoining parishes, and near to Archer and Johnson, and they were also within a few miles of Andrews and Oliver; the neighbourhood—as was all that district indeed up the valley—being wooded and beautiful.

And Burton was also a farmer, and about thirty years of age, the same age as Warden; but as he was ‘better off’ than Warden, he kept more horses, for he had more hunting. He also bred horses—good ones; and he took a pleasure in ‘breaking’ them himself, for he was a good rider, and, as we have seen in the cub-hunting, he could ‘stick’ a horse as well as most men.

The name of the place that he and his mother lived at was Boscabel, so named, or rather renamed, by an ancestor, ‘Bur-

ton of Burton,' who, being a staunch Royalist, sided with King Charles, and assisted, after the fight at Worcester, to shelter him from the 'crop-heads.' He paid dearly, however, for his loyalty, as he had afterwards to 'compound' to save his property.

So he set his teeth hard, for he had 'the blood of the Burtons' in him; and as soon as it was safe for him to do so, he changed the name of the place from the Warren to Boscabel; and making a new approach to it through the fields, he planted the one side of the road with Scotch firs, and the other with oaks, that at the time of our narrative had grown into a magnificent avenue; the interlacement of their branches, the rich browns of the one and the grays of the other, with the light greens and the gorse-greens of their foliage, making as nice a bit of colour as one would wish to see, especially when the sun shone through it, and brought out the red lights

on the fir-boughs, and threw such broad shadows beneath them, that were of such a rich soft green on the grass and so purple on the road, where they lay against the bright bars of sunlight that went slanting across it.

Alongside the avenue—or ‘the drive,’ as it was called—were the paddocks, the horses on the one side and the mares on the other. And as most of the colts and some of the hunters there were very fond of coming to the rails, just to have their noses rubbed and be messed with, the walk up there was a pleasant one.

And the old fellow who did the ditching at the farm—old William—was one of a family who had continued to live there, from father to son, from the time it was the Warren—not an uncommon thing in the country, in those places where they care for the labourers—and who therefore never forgot the bit of oak for his hat as

the day came round ; as he thought it ‘his dooty, sir,’ on the twenty-ninth of May, to commemorate the loyalty of the family by wearing the symbol of the king’s escape.

And if you met him in the avenue, as you often might do, ‘doin’ a bit o’ cuttin’, sir, to claire the draanes,’ he had always his little say ready for you, correct to the letter, ‘as how the oud master o’ all were a man o’ quality, sir, a good man an’ true ; as were put down—though it niver comed off, sir, more’s the pity—for a “Knight o’ the Royal Oak” by King Charles, as got up i’ the tree at Boscabel, sir, arter they’d druv him fro’ Ooster—you might a heerd on him, sir? —when that cussed oud Crummil pummild him—darn his body !

Burton, who was called ‘Charlie’ by his friends, and ‘young Mr. Charles’ by the men, though he was the only Mr. Charles now, his father being dead, was much liked in the neighbourhood, as he

had money to spend, and he spent it freely; and he had always a word for his workmen, and an eye to their cottages; and if people would only work while they were at it, and put their strength into it, there was always plenty of employment and fair wages for them at Boscabel. And there were those about there who began to think they might have before very long a young mistress at Boscabel, as well as a master; for ‘had not young Mr. Charles been a good deal at the Old Squire’s of late at Peyton Hall; and warn’t there that niece of his there, young Miss Florence, as had the golden hair?’ So the two things being incontrovertible facts, the rumour commenced; and, as the sequel will show, rumour for once was right.

Raymond was a neighbour of Burton, and lived at the Firs, the farm adjoining; but he was not, like Charlie, a hunting man.

To return to Warden and Burton, as they were seated by the fire.

‘Come in,’ shouted Warden, in response to a charivari at the door; ‘you are just in time, old fellow,’ said he, as Raymond entered—Jack Raymond of the Firs, a very great friend of his—and shook hands with them. ‘Why did you not drop in to dinner? Find a seat, will you, and bring yourself to an anchor. Pass the wine, Charlie, and produce the trophy.’

‘O, bother the trophy!’ said Burton. ‘He would call it “a tail,” and ask for “Zingari!”’

‘What tale?’ asked Raymond eagerly.

‘This,’ cried Charlie, catching him a dab on the cheek with a fox’s brush. ‘*Crede, crede, you unbelieving Ishmaelite; ecce signum!*’

‘You don’t mean to say you really won that?’ said Raymond, with astonishment.

‘Don’t I? But I do, my dear fellow,’ was

the reply. ‘*Veni, vidi, vici*; I went and did it.’

‘Give it out, Charlie,’ said Warden, ‘and let us have it; I have not yet heard the rights of it myself. It was a confounded nuisance I was unable to be with you; but it was our Board-day, and I wanted to bring forward the case of one of my men who is under the doctor’s hands.’

Thus exhorted, Burton settled himself in his chair, stuck the poker in the fire, and proceeded to give them the particulars of ‘the run from Henley.’

‘You know the big covers,’ said he, ‘near Henley Dingles? Well, making for the upper end of them, we took the outer ride, as the best place for a fair start; and waited there by the yews, amidst the whir of the pheasants and the crackling of the twigs, as the hounds worked beneath us in the wood—when Parker, who was ahead quietly listening, turned round briskly in

his saddle, with “Hush, you fellows; they have found for a certainty.” And he was right too, sure enough,’ said Burton, ‘as a low whimper, deepening into a bay, quickly proved, repeated and responded to, as it was again and again, by the whole pack.

“Hark! hark to Warrior!” cried Will, as he cantered up, standing in his stirrups, and looking ready to jump out of them. “Have at him there, my beauties—have at him! There’s a fox for a hundred!”

‘With a rustle and a rush up the bank, on they came with a crash, and with a jump and a scramble at the top, they left the woods for the open; Will, as their white sterns flickered at the fence, shouting, “Hold hard now, gentlemen, till they get away; he’s right for Brookwood, and we’re in for a good un! Come up, old horse. Now, stupid,” said he, as the old horse, getting a thonger, rapped the pleachers in his contempt for “a four-footer,” “are you going

to say your prayers at starting, you old beggar? Come along, I say!" And waking him up with a touch of the spur and a jib of the rein, he turned the corner of the cover; and then, pounding down a ride, reached the common just as the hounds, running well together, passed over it in front of him. Following in his wake,' said Burton, 'were Melville, Hardy, Lee, John Parker, Miller, and myself; our horses well in hand, and ourselves ready to cut out work for the best of them. As the hounds half checked and feathered by the pool, Will's whip-hand stopped us; then, as they went on again up the grass-lands for Lilton village, we gave our steeds their heads, and put them to it. For more than twenty minutes, my boys, we had it to ourselves,' said he, 'hard and fast; for not a soul could live with us; and as we rode together, each on his own line, we took our fences in our stride, and went like pigeons.

‘Passing Thriftlands by the shrubbery—you know the swing-gate,’ said Charlie—‘we skirted the gravel-pits, and made for Haines; then bending to the left, we crossed Croome Hill, and went on by the Elms to Tedby, and from thence to the ash-beds, and through the fold at Trew’s; and then, with a ring round the outbuildings there, where he failed to effect a lodgment, we pushed him through the brook in the meadows, and put his nose straight for Horton’s, the tops of whose kilns we could see before us; the hounds,’ said Burton, ‘running at that time almost in view, and with scent breast high.

“We cannot stay to try your barland this time, Tom,” said Miller to Sleyford, who had nicked across country, and had just come up with us; “the pace won’t allow it.”

“No,” was the reply; “but you shall as we come back, if we do but kill.”

'A good fellow is Tom,' said Burton.

'Just as we thought,' said Charlie, 'the fox had missed the water, and we were right for Brookwood, a sheep-dog made a dash at him, and he went straight for the river like an otter.'

"Confound that!" said Hardy, as the hounds swung round. "Now how shall we get over?"

"Wait, my dear fellow, till he has crossed," I said, continued Burton, "and watch the varmint!"

"He might swim down the side," said Lee, "and then come out again; I have known it happen."

"Not he," said Hardy; "the one we have up is a straight one, George, there is no mistake about it. Before he hangs a yard he will make his point, you'll see; that is if hounds will let him, for they are pretty close to him."

"He is over then, safe enough; look

there!" said Hardy. "That fellow in the field seems going frantic, as if he had not long to live, poor wretch!—quite off his head, that's clear. The first time he has seen a fox perhaps; if so, excusable. Well, gentlemen," said Hardy, "we are sold! The water is all out; we are done! Here is off, for one, for home! The hounds are gone, and we can't get over; and if we tried the bridge, they would be so far by then that we should not catch them."

"So Hardy left," said Burton.

"To know that "Charley" was over the water, and the pack on good terms with him, was, however, quite enough for me," said Burton; 'the game hounds had a hard struggle to cross though, so I raced for it and I had it! I stopped the "field," swam the river, and got the brush; and here it is, my bonny boys, and a fizzer too!" cried he, as he flourished it above him with a 'Tally O!'

‘How did you manage it?’ said Warden.

‘I will tell you,’ said Charlie. ‘You know that big pasture piece by Langley Wood, between Horton’s and Brookwood, that skirts the hop-yards? As we jumped into it,’ said he, ‘the hounds were near, and going at a rattling pace straight for the river, with the confounded sheep-dog ahead of them! Well, we of course knew by the silence of the weir it was then brim-full; but to turn for the lanes, as a lot of them were doing, was to miss the finish; so, catching the music of the hounds as they were streaming up the banks, we raced for the withy beds, the Miller shouting to us as we neared the mill, “The water’s out and half-way up the wheel; go back!”’

‘And so it was,’ said Charlie, ‘through some heavy weather somewhere up the country aiding the storm we had a week ago; the river rushing by us as red as marl. But that did not matter, for the

hounds were on; so his noisy warnings were of no use whatever, at least to me,' said Burton; 'but that we should be drowned seemed certain to him. There was no need therefore to say that he had not hunted—poor timid wretch!—for he would have had more thought if he had, and have been more reasonable, as the hounds were over.'

'But you can't swim,' said Raymond, 'can you?'

'Not a stroke,' said Charlie.

'I wonder you risked it, then,' said Warden.

'But could you have stayed, now, Fred, had you been there? No, not a bit of it, I know,' said Burton warmly. 'The hounds were across, so into it we went, when swish came the water over the saddle-bow, and splash I had it in the eyes; but with a plunge or two forwards, that sent a shower-bath all over us, we were soon in mid-stream, where, caught by the rush of the

water, we got swept,' said Charlie, 'right round the corner by the mill-wheel.'

'You mad-brained fellow,' said Warden, 'it was a mercy you were not drowned, horse and all!'

'You know the old saying,' was the reply.

'Lifted by the swirl,' continued he, 'and swinging down the river with the flood, we got buffeted by the bushes and bumped against the trees, and we seemed in for a settler plump against the boat-house. Missed, however, by a twist, we grated through the reeds—a nasty bit, as they were under water, big bulrushes, and might have held us—and then we hit the bank, which turned us round and very nearly over, and drove us on against a little island.'

'But still there was no chance to land; for the flood, though it got divided there, was far too swift and the bushes too close.'

'So keeping her well in hand,' said

Charlie, 'and her head straight, I sat her motionless, and let her drift to where the river widens past some meadows, and there she steadied; so it was then all plain sailing,' said he. 'So letting her float on to get her wind, I bore gently across the stream and slewed her round, and touched the bottom on a sandy shallow, where, dripping as she was, the dear old thing! I let her stand,' said Burton, 'to feel her feet a bit and to think it over, I patting her wet neck and talking to her, the darling beauty!'

'It was only for a minute though,' said he; 'for with a whinny her head was round and up, and her eyes were bright, and her ears well forwards listening for the hounds, like the good mare she is.'

'A rare mare,' Warden said, 'that's certain, Charlie.'

'She is a clipper, Fred!' said he; 'a perfect hunter! She heard them evidently,' continued Burton, 'though I did not; for

the river's roar still hung about my ears, it was so loud. Champing at her bit, she began to fret; so I let her then make for an ash-bed, and though it was crumbling stuff, and loose and rotten, she scrambled up the bank in a minute, and poked her way between the stubs and branches till we got to the boundary fence, which she then jumped like a greyhound.'

'What a plucky old girl!' said Warden. 'Many a mare would have been beaten, driven along by the flood as she was.'

'That's certain,' said Charlie.





CHAPTER XII.

THE RUN FROM HENLEY—A WET JACKET FOR A WHITE TIP.

‘WE were near getting a purler, though,’ continued Burton, ‘for the drop was a deep one; the place being a holloway, and the spot, as I found,’ said Charlie, ‘close by where we met the gipsies the day we were fishing there below the ford.’

‘I remember it,’ said Warden.

‘Who told our fortunes, and who promised us riches—those dark-eyed girls with whom you had a chatter, and fell in love with for their blue-black hair. O, don’t deny it,’ said Charlie; ‘it was quite excusable.’

‘Not I, Charlie, but you,’ said Warden.

‘O, I know better, Fred,’ replied Charlie. ‘I never saw a fellow cut like you were. Sonnets for a month, at least, was what I looked for, on olive skins and wicked hazel eyes.

‘Well, seeing then,’ said he, ‘the line of country, I put her on the turf, and cantered on to where the hounds had crossed below the mill; when some one shouting out to me,’ said Charlie, ‘I looked over the river, and saw Will and Parker by the side of it, pounding along and on a level with us.

‘It seems,’ said Burton, ‘that when we were swept downwards by the flood, they followed through the gates along the fields to see the ending of it; but finding that when we got beyond the island we steadied, they turned again to get round by the bridge, and so try to catch the hounds, as they knew then that we should not come to grief, at least that journey.

‘Though they did have the start of us,’ said he, ‘we came in level, as we went by the side of the water, and they had to go round through the gates. “Come, put the gray in, Warne; don’t hesitate, you craven fellow,” I shouted out,’ said Charlie, ‘as Will stood looking. “Below there, where I landed. If you don’t flurry him, you will get him over. Come, come on! You’ll never see your hounds else all the morning, you stupid fellow; for, all the fresher for the bath they had, they are slick away by now, straight for the hills, and with a blazing scent. Come, come along! Give him a lead, Parker,” I said; “now don’t be cowards!”’

‘They evidently thought discretion the better part of valour,’ said Raymond.

‘I think so,’ said Burton.

‘But,’ continued Charlie, ““Too deep,” said Will; and “It’s far too swift,” said Parker; “we shall go down the meadows

to the bridge." "Three down and three up," I said, "just six long miles; so Tally O! my boys. Here's off for hounds. I mean to try to see the run if no one else does, if I can only once drop in with them."

'Turning her head up-hill,' said Burton, 'I reached the banks as Will and Parker started for the bridge, a longish rounder. Up at the top, a good backing to some cottages, there is a large fir-wood,' said he, 'Crow Coppice, round which I galloped to the farther end, as from there I knew I could see a long way up the valley, and might spy hounds; and I then drew rein,' said Charlie, 'to breathe the mare and listen.

'The sweep of country that you get from there is certainly worth seeing,' said he; 'and I thought of Archer. Had he been with us yesterday, as he hoped to be, I think it would have chained him to the spot; for he is fond of such scenes, as he

finds in them more or less of that fine form and colour that he sees in most country subjects, and on which, once give him rein, he likes to dwell. “I see the hounds,” said he, “but very little else besides the fences.”

‘But he is such a fellow,’ said Charlie; ‘he has eyes for all, and seems to see that which most others would be sure to miss; and yet he never fails to keep a good place with hounds. That men do not see all things alike is very evident. A man has eyes for that he thinks most of; not that I cannot “see” things when they are shown me, but as I go,’ said he, ‘I pass them—he observes. And so it is, at least I fancy so, that even on blank days he never grumbles. Quite an enthusiast,’ said Charlie, ‘is Master Archer.

‘While gently on the move,’ said he, ‘I looked and listened; but I could not see the hounds, nor could I hear them, though the wind met me; when, as I had again to

check the mare for her impatience, the tiny tinkle of a sheep-bell reached me, like sheep disturbed. And then some jays flew about from tree to tree, with a cry and a chatter; and sparrows rustled up in the bushes; and some magpies went away, and dropped into an elm-tree in a dingle.

‘That looked, I thought, just like a fox afoot, and I wondered how far by then the hounds were with the hunt one. When all at once, not fifty yards ahead, I spied,’ said Charlie, ‘the black-tipped nose of Reynard through the hedgerow; then out he jumped, and without looking round, he went off lazily, and reached a drain-hole under some thorns and briars that overhung it.

‘I saw it was our hunt-fox by his move, and by the dirty brush that he trailed after him; so I felt that it was all up with him,’ said he, ‘and that I was safe for the finish, and his “white tip” mine. There’s a beauty

for you,' said Charlie, as he held up the brush admiringly; 'as fluffy as possible, and as soft as wool. Just feel it.

'Quieting the mare,' said he, 'who with pricked ears and dilated nostrils trembled with excitement, as she saw the fox and heard the distant challenge of the hounds as they turned towards us—the fox, it seems, was headed—I waited their swing up the valley and their dash through the cover, and then, as they came on bounding over the fence, I capped them to his hiding-place; and with a shout of "Tally O, away!" I put him up,' said Burton, 'almost in the midst of them.

'They raced him for a field or two, then tumbled on to him and chopped him. Time, one hour and forty minutes; and he was as fine a dog-fox as you ever saw !

'With a wild "Who-whoop!"' said he, 'I was on my feet, and laying about me lustily; then lodging the carcass by a

lucky fling in a big burr-oak, I coached the hounds off, lit my pipe, and sat down by them, the mare grazing alongside me quietly enough, with Harold and Dauntless sniffing at her heels, and the whole pack baying round her; when, feeling for the first time that I had been in for a good wetting,' said Charlie, 'and that keeping still would not mend the mare or me, I slipped my arm through the reins, and briskly circled the hounds with her again and again, they continuing to bay and to jump against the tree, in their vain efforts to get at the fox.

'Still no one came,' said he, 'but a few loafing labourers, all eyes and dialect; and I scarcely knew how to act, as I did not like to "brush" the fox, nor did I care to wait. So getting one of the rustics to move the mare about, clear of hounds, I got up in the tree, by using my whip freely; and to my great joy—as I could not have left

the hounds—I saw horsemen in the distance, evidently,' said he, 'thrown out, and on the listen.

'Waving my handkerchief,' said Burton, 'and shouting for very life, with any quantity of Tally Os and Who-whoops, till you may have heard the hounds' "bay" for miles, I put them on the move; and by the time I began,' said he, 'to think that I must either throw the fox down or have the hounds up, Will, Parker, the whips, and a few others, came trotting towards us; they having pounded for the bridge, and been not only completely thrown out, but also, as I was glad to find, the cowardly fellows,' said Burton, 'in for a regular leg-wetting there in the flood that was over the road.'

'You ungrateful imp!' said Warden. 'Why, they first of all hindered their own time to see after you, and fish you out if you needed it!'

‘Yes,’ said Charlie grumblyingly; ‘and so do the coroner out of his fee, and lose the hounds into the bargain. I don’t believe in it,’ said he. ‘No man ought to hunt unless he can take care of himself; and with hounds going, and a good fox in front of them, nothing should stop him.’

‘Not even an impracticable fence?’ said Warden, who remembered one he himself failed to negotiate a week or two previously.

‘No fence whatever,’ said Burton; ‘because you can always manage to tumble over it or roll through it if it is too big to jump; and when you are once on the other side of it, why you can pick yourself up and go on.’

‘You are a funny fellow,’ said Warden.

‘Chaffing and fraternising,’ continued Charlie, ‘we broke up the fox, compared notes, and brought the hounds home; and may I never,’ said he, as he held up the

brush to them, 'have a worse finish to a good run than this, my boys, or ever grudge a wet jacket for a white tip. Friends both, I looks towards you. Here's "Our noble selves, and success to hunting!"'

'A good toast: drink it up,' said Warden. 'More power to your elbow, my dear fellow. *Palmam qui meruit ferat*—may the best man win !'

'You will have a large cold over that lot, I should think,' said Raymond.

'Not unlikely; it will have been in a good cause though, if I do,' said Burton.

'Now,' said Warden, 'will you two fellows have some more wine ?'

'No more for me; 'Nor for me,' they replied.

'Then if you won't,' said he, 'I will ring for coffee.'

Burton and Raymond, whose roads lay together — their farms adjoining — stayed chatting there until the moon was up, so as

to have it all the lighter for their walk. Outside the village they came up with Styles—Tom Styles the earthstopper—who was just starting to go up into the woods, with Barnes the blacksmith, to make things safe for next morning's hunting; for though the meet was fixed for five miles from there—at Highdown Hill—unless hounds found at once and went away, they would be pretty sure to draw on through the hill-covers, and reach there. So Tom was off on duty with his chum.

As it was a most jolly night, with a nice sniff of frost that made them enjoy it, they turned into the wood along with them; it being in fact, were it not for the time it took to climb it, a much nearer way for them than by road.

Styles was at home, of course, at all times there, and so was the blacksmith, who was a most rank old poacher, and knew each place where they must pick their feet

up; but fairly in the wood, Raymond and Charlie Burton both kept stumbling over the drips and ruts, and roots and things, for it was so dark there.

However, the higher they went, the lighter it got; and after staying nearly two hours there poking about the wood with them, and handling the mattocks for the fun of the thing, they left them, to work their way up in the dim light to the old stile at the top of the wood, through the briars and bushes, as all the pathway there had wholly vanished; having dropt into the dingle through a large landslip, that after the great storm a week ago, that set all the brooks on and made waterfalls in the woods, brought down tons of soil into the gullies, considerably astonishing the rabbits, and scaring all the owls and sundry badgers.

It also scared that old witch, Creep, 'the charmer,' who was out there by her

hut—a charcoal-burner's—and doing incantations, with notched sticks, for warts, and lovers, fits, things lost, and property, cutting and burying them with mumbled words. She thought her time come, but she touched her charms and shook her beads, and then she sang out 'Jacob!' as she made a cross and circle with her crutch; then flopping on her knees, she said 'Amen' backwards, ten to the minute, till her breath was gone; and then got up and shook herself, a good one, and turning round three times, rapped her tobacco-box, and so felt better.

Such was at least the tale the keeper told, who was out on the watch there and said he saw her, and that if there was one black cat out with her that night, he knows that he saw fifty. She keeps but five though; but as perhaps they too were twisting 'ten to the minute,' they might have seemed fifty to him.

At length, by climbing over the soil and

pushing through the bushes, they reached the stile at the top, and got over it on to the sheep-walk just above the wood, where the hill, flattened at the top, shelved downwards, through gorse and ferns, into a hollow, and then, sloped by undulations to a valley, which, taking a crescent sweep, joined further on with the same valley that they had just come out of.

And while they stood there upon the sheep-walk before descending, they could not resist the impulse of exclamation—little as either of them was accustomed to be influenced by impressions of the beautiful—as they saw the whole country round bathed in the moonlight; the Teme beneath them white between the willows, and the meadows silvery where the wood-shadows cut them.

‘You will have it fine,’ said Raymond, ‘for the fixture.’

‘I don’t know that,’ said Burton; ‘for there is just a trace of halo round the

moon, and I can hear the weir, so the wind is this way. The woodpeckers—"œcles," as they call them round here—were on too all the morning, and the sky was low. I fancy myself there will be rain before long, and a good thing too if there is,' said he; 'it will help the scent, my boy, and give us all a right good rattling gallop.'





CHAPTER XIII.

SUNSHINE AFTER RAIN—THE STORM AND THE CLEARING.

‘WELL, old man,’ said Archer, looking in at the studio, ‘I thought I should find you here. Still at work I see, and as busy as ever. How goes the picture? Have you finished it? If the price will suit, I know a customer; and so I thought I would have a ride over and tell you.’

‘Thanks,’ said Johnson. ‘How are you? There is the picture then, “Storm clearing;” this is for a companion,’ said he, “Approaching Storm;” and Johnson placed the pictures on the easel, side by side. ‘Do you like them?’

‘Yes, very much,’ said Archer; ‘they

make a tidy pair. Now you have finished that, it looks right well ; those cows make quite a point against the blue. I thought they would,' said he.

' That is thanks to you, then, for the hints you gave me. How about this one, Archie ?'

' A selling-looking picture,' was the answer, ' and the better of the two, if you don't "scamp" it. What will the figure be, do you think, for those when framed,' said Archer—' twelve ten a piece ?'

' No, twelve the pair ; that's quite their worth, I'm very sure,' said Johnson.

' Well, you know best, but that is far too cheap ; I will get him call and see them when they are finished.'

' Had you been here but half an hour ago,' said Johnson, ' you would have met with Fred, who asked about you.'

' What, Collins ?'

' Yes, I told him of the ride he missed,

through dingle scenery that he is so fond of, and which, as you described it, was worth seeing. He had just come in by train ; he has been to Town ; but as he wanted to be getting on—he leaves at twelve—he could not stay. If we should go some day,' said Johnson, 'to see that brook, he has promised he will join us with a block. He is good at umber-work, and black-and-white, but he seldom colours. "Prout's brown" he swears by.'

'Look here, old man,' said Archer, criticising ; 'I think those figures there are scarcely right ; the cows and sheep should all be lying down, not up, as you have got them ; I saw and watched the very thing on Tuesday.'

'Why, were you not with hounds at Rookwood, then?' said Johnson.

'Most certainly I was ; but when I am out, and as you ought to know,' said Archer, 'I have eyes for hounds and also eyes for

nature; and as there came a storm, I thought of you,—you and your picture; and so,' said he, 'I watched the coming and the clearing of it, over just such a sweep of country as you have there.

'A case in point now, Johnson, and what I dwell on. If you would hunt, I am certain,' Archer said, 'that it would pay you; but you don't, and you won't. So that which you might have seen for yourself and utilised, when you returned with it all fresh before you, I must now,' said he, 'furnish you with at second-hand; as it is just possible you might perhaps get a hint or two from it that would mend your picture.'

'Well, wait a bit,' said Johnson; 'I want to use this tint while I see form. If I look off it, I shall miss or mull it. My eye's "in" now.'

'All right, old fellow; don't let me disturb you. Tincey! come here, you rascal; I

never saw you. Come, doggie! You ought to take him out, not pen him here,' said Archer, patting him.

'I do so,' Johnson answered, 'when I can; and I should take him with me oftener, but he is such a dog to race about and bark at everything and everybody — the noisy little scamp! His weakness too for rabbits gets him wired, which often hinders my time to get him out again; and when I do release him, he is no sooner out than he is in again. He is a perfect turk, in fact,' said he, 'at fur and feathers; and when I am able to get out for a few miles, if the farmers see him racing about over their grounds, they don't like it, I can tell you. They half-suspect you are poaching; and if you enter into explanations, they think the sketching but a mere excuse, and they say, "Well, if you come, sir, please don't bring the dog, or else, you see, the landlord will be grumbling, and tell us we're har-

bouring persons who destroy the game. The game we keep, sir, for other folks to kill, at injury to our crops and no pay for it.' So that you see, Archie, I have to leave him here, when very often I should like his company. He has his scurry, however, night and morning, along the meadows, and chivies the ducks at the ferry ; don't you, you rascal ?' said Johnson ; ' so he does not do amiss. Be quiet, Tiney ! Settle him down, will you ?' said he, as Tiney's attentions became too obtrusive, ' and keep him by you ; for when it takes him that way, he will start with sudden dash across my box, and make the colours fly, if I happen just to scratch the canvas while I am working. Such sound is "mouse" to him. Mouse on the brain has Tiney, that is certain. Show him a bit of sugar, John, and then he'll stay there ; or put it on his nose, and that will fix him. Did you have a good day on Tuesday ?'

‘A fairish ending,’ was the reply; ‘but a bad beginning.’

‘Well, what did you see besides the storm to tell a fellow?’

‘O, a decent bit or two, as we went on again,’ said Archer, ‘after the rain had ceased and the storm passed over.’

‘How does that look now?’ said Johnson.

‘Better,’ said Archer; ‘but leave it till I have said my say and told my story. Work at the cows,’ said he, ‘and put them well in grass; all down, and half asleep.’

‘Stay! Begin at the beginning,’ Johnson said; ‘then I am with you.’

‘It would be too long,’ said Archer, ‘and would only tire you; so I must skip it. Besides, at first, though we had a pretty find at Rookwood, hounds could not run, for there was no scent whatever—not a particle; but just as some of us thought of turning off for home, disgusted, indications

of rain showed themselves. The cattle down below us in the fields had ceased to graze now you, you see, have got them up and grazing. The sheep lay huddled with their noses down, each in the grass; and they are up also in your picture, Johnson; and woodpeckers were on the move and noisy, flying low from bough to bough with warning cry, and hurrying on; the robins too kept twittering on the thorns; and on the trees the dead leaves were all tremulous, their rustlings audible. And a cold wind came, that made us shrug our shoulders and move our horses on, to stir our blood; and even the hounds drew lazily and seemed irresolute. That looked like rain, old man,' said Archer, 'and soon we had it —a perfect downpour! But we all were glad of it.

‘ Above us, inky clouds, lit up a-top, with half-tints deep down in amongst the shadows, were moving rapidly and changing

form—a sure sign, Johnson. A flood of light too, next a rainy distance—like that you have there—though still unblotched, was narrowing visibly. As the storm neared, the sky became one tint, changing from blue-black to a dull steel-gray—yours is too slatey—with curved lines sweeping downwards to the earth—ay, there you are right,’ said he—‘and coming swiftly on to where we were, under some branching oaks, on chance of shelter.

‘Then, Johnson, it got dark, and big drops fell, and wet first one bit by us, then another, as we scrooged closer in amongst the bushes, till, with a rattling patter overhead, the rain came down with splash, that sent a shower of dead leaves from the trees, and trickled from the hard ground as it fell, until the steady downpour at last let it in, and so made softer going for our horses.

‘Talk of “storm clearing,” Johnson !

well, I saw it,' said Archer; 'as good a bit as you could wish to see. Yours there is good, old fellow, but that was different; so I will tell you all about it if you like. It might come in.'

'It might,' said Johnson; 'so let us have it, Archie.'

'We got wet through of course,' said he, 'for boughs were bare; but as the rain brought scent, that did not matter. Well, Johnson, in half an hour or so the storm passed over, and rolled on up the valley for the hills; for it got lurid there, and thundered heavily. And as the clouds that it left broke up, they made a rift in the sky that let the blue in, as I suggested in that picture there,' said Archer, 'and framed the landscape; and showed, behind the storm and under sunny clouds, a sweep of splendid country in the distance.'

'The valley lying in a mellow haze, like that Cuyp, Johnson, that we saw at Dulwich,

and quite as luminous, ended in hills, softened in shape, and of a warm gray hue, and touched with purple in their deepest shadows; and all their forms were half defined and blended, being misty in the thickened air about them. And then,' said Archer, 'when the sun burst through, it sent a ripple of bright light across it, that showed, in what was haze, trees, tower, and spire.'

'I have seen the same effect myself,' said Johnson. 'It is very nice. That gradual dawning, as it were, of form, and the growing into shape of trees and hills, is worth the watching. I think few things are finer than the clothing of a valley with its woods—the burst of beauty when its mists withdraw. You see,' said he, 'that I have noticed it, and watched it often, though, Archie, I don't hunt.'

'You hunting men,' said Johnson, 'may gain in this way. As you are out in weather we should shirk, you get effects that

we perhaps should very often miss. Also in distance, you ride more miles each time, we'll say, than we could walk; and also go where we could not well go if merely sketching; and so,' said he, 'I have no doubt that you often get amongst the woods and hills some first-rate bits, gloriously wild and suitable for canvas, that in a beaten track would be but tame.

'And when you are on the move, from high ground too,' said he, 'as in the valley country—our own sweet valley, Archer—easy on horseback, but not so on foot, you get such transitory things—gleams, lights, cloud-shadows, mists, and atmosphere, that they are always useful to a fellow; that I must own,' said Johnson, 'for you have told me, John, so many times about them.'

'Come, I like that; now that is good,' said Archer. 'You'll hunt in time. It is just what I maintain, that artist eyes see all there is out hunting, and artists get

material that makes money, and cheaper too, old man, that way than any other, as they get more in a given time, and better too, from speedier locomotion and ability to go just where they please, or at least where hounds go. Of course,' said Archer, 'I only speak of observation, that serves you in good stead when at the easel, as enabling you to make much of "accidental" form, and to reproduce mental photographs of tints and tones, and hues and shades, that perhaps were too fleeting to be sketched; or "bits" and groupings that you could merely notice. But for actual studies, Johnson, you must sit down by them. That "goes without the telling."

'You are right,' said Johnson. 'I interrupted you though, old fellow, in "the clearing."'

'O well,' said Archer; 'as I said, 'twas good. As the light spread over the woods and on the vale below, there burst upon

the view,' said he, 'distinct and clear, and in mid-distance, deep dips and hillocks, woods and sheen of water, old farms and country churches, and ivied houses, with quaint old gable-ends and chimney-stacks, red roofs and shedding. And nearer still, with soft cloud-shadows on it, a river-sweep of yellow winter grass, dotted with cows and sheep, now up and grazing. Now don't you see,' said Archer, 'with cattle rightly placed, you aid the feeling?'

'Just so,' said Johnson.

'The belt of woods below, being soaked with rain, gave out the resin odour of the pines, whose ruddy stems, in sandy hollows that were near to us—you know the glorious colour that they have,' said Archer—'merged from beneath the banks with twisted roots. And as we went along, all things seemed freshened; for the air was clear,' said he, 'and the sky looked high, and shadows from the trees fell on the turf,

into the red dead leaves and long wet grasses, that lay in heaps and matted masses by the oaks. The larches dripped into the golden fern, and every purple spray showed beady drops; the birds were on the move, and some in song; and all around us seemed instinct with life, bare though the trees were, and the month November.

‘And as we rode on,’ said he, ‘some jays flew out and settled in the firs, and sheep got up and nibbled at the grass, and rooks dropped on the plough, for easy captures now the soil was wetted. A cloud of wood-pigeons too rose up, and swooped as suddenly; and twisted hawthorns, creamed with bloom in summer, but bare of leaves and berried over now, had swift-winged visitors that stole the fruit. Storm over, Johnson!

‘And as we rode along the lanes,’ said Archer, ‘we saw the blue sky in the rain-

washed channels, between sundry patches of bright bits of colour, from pebble-stones that were no longer dusty. The big bents in the hedgerows hung their heads, and trailed into the ditch, all wet and heavy; and every cup-like leaf had water in it. The close crisp turf that lay beside the road shone in the sun,' said he, 'and seemed to sparkle over; and the meadow at the end looked emerald—wet from the rain, and vivid as it was with contrast on it, from the upturned dress and faded winter shawl—a gleam of white and red—of a youngster, with a basket on her arm; a very pretty child, old man, I can assure you, and quite a model.'

'Look here a moment, Archie, interrupting you,' said Johnson.

'Yes,' said Archer, getting up and looking at the picture; 'you have that better now; the cows especially.'

'Well, we turned into this meadow with

the hounds, through a gate the rosy girl held open for us, and who said her father was a woodcutter, at work close by there where we meant to draw, when the hounds, at least, no longer paused to sniff the little basket that she had, where lay his dinner ; or wait more patting by the merry child, who, being used to hounds, would pet and play with them. 'Will saw the man,' said Archer ; 'and as they had not commenced to fell the timber, and there seemed good lying, he said that he would try it, and draw through it ; and so get on beyond to Darnley Woods.

'We kept the ground above,' continued Archer ; 'skirting the farms by ricks and wainhouses. Such lumber there, my boy,' said he ; 'rich browns and neutral tints, pale straws and grays, and bits of blue and dabs of brightest red, and splendid colour on old rusty iron, half hidden amongst dock-leaves and great thorns ; with white and speckled

fowls too perched about it, under soine branching elms, by ragged shedding—a mass of weather-stained old moss and thatch—a “Birket Foster” bit,’ he said, ‘ that you must see.’

‘ Yes, that,’ said Johnson, ‘ ought to come well, Archie. How can we reach it?’

‘ By rail to Darnley. It is close against the common—another bit which I will tell you of,’ said Archer. ‘ While Will was pointing for the Darnley Woods, hounds down below him, we kept the teamroad on along the fields, and waited at the common till he came through the gate at the end with them, “drawn blank,” as we expected.

‘ Well, Johnson, now about that common,’ continued Archer; ‘ there’s good material there, heath-seenes and figures, gipsies and tramps, with tents and stock-in-trade, and water too, with fine Scotch firs and lots of spotted cattle, and any quantity of gray-green gorse. I also saw a half-bushed

gravel-pit, with men at work, and water at the bottom; wherein the reflex of the sky was seen, the sandy banks and dark lines of the wagons, and just the pink nose of the old gray horse, asleep or dozing.

‘Some solemn-looking donkeys too,’ said he, ‘were there, tended by lads who did not spare the stick, which they therefore—eh, Johnson?—deserved themselves. And there was a flock of gray geese from a near farmyard, and three people rabbitting; the deep red vest of one man making colour; and a round pool edged with willows near the road, with two buxom girls—one stooping down for water—come from the cottages, a lot of white ones; a disused saw-pit too,’ said he, ‘with schoolboys playing, but leaving off at once at sight of hounds; and a wayside inn, or “ale-house” I should say, a most likely place no doubt for scamps and poachers—with a wood-pile at the back there by some pigsties; a rare

good hiding-place for some old fox,' said Archer; 'and on a cord, from a stable-looking shed to an old tree stump just by some ragged palings, there were some garments flapping in a briskish wind; a bright and wavy line of shifting colour.'

'A good bit that; that's useful,' Johnson said. •

'So that, you see, there are lots of things there,' said Archer, 'to make a picture, and where you would always find some decent bits.'

'Ah, those commons are good places, certainly,' said Johnson; 'we will go there, John.'





CHAPTER XIV.

FLIRTATION IN THE FERNERY—JANE CLARE
AND JOHN ARCHER.

‘WE then crossed the road,’ continued Archer, ‘on to the turf, and cantered up the hedge-side to the end of it; when Will led us up the lanes to some plantations; and then, as we did not do any good there, we trotted on,’ said he, ‘with the hounds to the woods — Darnley Woods, which stretched, with a sweep of purply-brown and gray, along the hills, and sloped down to the village.’

‘Darnley? Why, that,’ said Johnson, ‘is where that view was from they made so much of at the Old Water Colour. It hung upon “the line,” three from the cen-

tre, and sold at the private view. Charles Barrow bought it. It had some cedars in it.'

'Ay, I remember it,' said Archer. 'O, very likely; there are some round there; lots of things, in fact, Johnson. Well, hoping to get a straight thing on the grass, now that the rain had been and laid the scent, the hounds were put in at the upper end; and the moment they were in,' said he, 'they winded him.'

"I knew," cried Atherstone—you know old Ather, Johnson?—"we'd find a fox. Hark how they are on him! Come, now, that is good. Quick, push on, Archer, for they will soon be out," said he. "Too-loo, my boy! we have got a run at last. That rain was splendid."

"Hush! there you are," said he; "they are out and gone away; and if I am not mistaken, straight for Luton. Here, nick across these grounds," said Ather, "and save the gates. I hate those wickets; a fence be-

fore a gate for me, my boy. We'll take the fences; they are nothing much, and there is but one flight of rails. Come on.' He is always a straight-goer,' said Archer, 'and a good one.

'While many took the rides and rode the cover, and then got on beyond it through the gates, we turned our horses at the fence,' said Archer, 'and dropped into a meadow from the road; and then took our own line on a sweep of grass, that curved beneath the woods up to the village; so at a clinking gallop we cornered hounds, and came up with them, going like the wind, and tearing on across some small enclosures, with deep-ditched hedgerows, ditched on either side; so that very soon lots of the men were down, as in those narrow slingity bits you get your second fence too close on the first, and so,' said he, 'you often get into the ditches, and stop there.

'By pulling our horses together, however,' said Archer, 'we dropped them to a pace, and fled the fences, and did one of them on and off, as we were too close to fly it, and we very soon got placed; as the hounds feathered as they crossed a road, and then getting on to some dry plough past the storm, slow-hunted.

'Being now well with them,' said Archer, 'and with a nice little lot, and select, we settled down to feel our seats a bit, and to swing with the hounds fairly over the fences, taking the rough and the smooth together, just as they came. And then we tried to cut each other down, and laughed at the purls we had; as men will do, Johnson,' said he, 'when their heads are loose; when Ather, who was just then riding rashly, spied that young George Hill speeding for some rails, that were snug in a corner, and a tempting bit; the fence beside them being big and brushy.

“Just watch me, John; I’ll cut him down at those, the cheeky fellow,’ said Ather, as he raced across the meadow.

‘Then reaching the rails, he took them at an angle,’ said Archer, ‘right in the face of him, and made his horse swerve, and so sent poor Georgy flying, who dropped well in the hedge up to his neck, and stuck there; for we never saw anything more of him after that,’ said he.

‘However, Johnson,’ continued Archer, ‘retribution followed. Ather was racing along with Marston for an “only” place, in a stiff blackthorn-fence, across a pasture, when each of them trying to be first through it—as it was too high to get over it—they cannoned, fell, and rolled; and right between them, as they lay, well grassed, Tom Taylor went and took it.’

‘Good,’ said Johnson, laughing, as he touched up the cows, and strengthened the tint on the red one.

‘Well, for half an hour or more,’ said Archer, ‘the pace was killing; and as the fences were good ones, the falls were not few; so before long, horses were loose and galloping, thinking perhaps that, now they were by themselves, they should see more of it than with their riders on them; so most of them took the fences and followed the hounds well, as they often will do, Johnson, when,’ said Archer, ‘they have the right stuff in them.

‘We were now getting near to some hanging covers,’ said he, ‘that lay beside a long low ridgy hill; Will doing all he could do to kill his fox before he got there, lest we changed. But though each hound strained every nerve to reach him, pug took us to the covers; and there, hounds stood!

“He’s down!” cried Will, “for us to find another. We’ll nick him yet, the varmint; hoick there, hoick! Just thong that hedgerow, will you, Mr. Archer? while I

take this side," Will said, "and Dick the other, and cast round."

'Cracking my whip,' said Archer, 'I rode up by the ditch; and as I got near to the end of it, out jumped the fox.'

'That was lucky, however,' said Johnson.

'It was,' said Archer.

'I gave "a view," and turning short round, I topped the fence, and raced him up a ride, to force him through; Will and Dick,' said he, 'meeting me with the hounds, who owned at once, and went away merrily.'

'Bustling them on with pretty well of voice, we took the outer fence, and reached the open, well rid of that long wood, as it was so safe for foxes; and they ran him through some fields up to a park—where deer half spoiled the scent—and down a lane, and into some little gardens, behind some cottages, just by a common; where I,'

said Archer, 'just as they "viewed" him, found a fore-shoe off. And so, confound the thing, I came to grief, and had to seek a smith.'

'A nuisance that,' said Johnson; 'so you lost them?'

'I did,' said Archer; 'but I heard the kill though, and I met them coming back with the hounds, as I turned from the shop.'

'There, then,' said Johnson, putting down his palette; 'now I'll leave off a bit.'

'Ay, do,' said Archer. 'Come to the Fox with me, and see my mare.'

'And how is Charlie now?' said Johnson, as he put up his brushes and prepared to go out with Archer.

'O, never better,' replied Archer. 'He is out three days a week, and leads the ruck, at least most days.'

'I heard he was at Warden's,' Johnson said. 'He is lucky to have got off as he

has, the stupid fellow, after a wetting like the one he had.'

'Ah,' said Archer, 'it was the day after the run he was there. He was all right then, and at Highdown—we had a good thing from there, Johnson—but he has been in for sciatica since then,' said he, 'pretty stiffly.'

'And serve him right too,' said Johnson.

'Come, now, be merciful,' said Archer; 'for it was a plucky thing to do. Now don't you think so?'

'Foolhardy, I should call it,' said Johnson; 'but you hunt, I don't; and that, you perhaps will say, makes all the difference. Are you but just come in, then?'

'But an hour ago. I put up at the Fox,' said Archer, 'and came straight here, thinking it likely I should find you come, as you are an early bird.'

'Yes; I generally get here by ten at

latest. A splendid morning! I quite enjoyed the walk,' said Johnson, 'down Severn-side.'

'And I the ride,' said Archer.

'All well at home, John?'

'Quite well,' said Archer, 'thank you.'

So Johnson knew by that that Kate was well.

'And how are all your people?' said Archer. 'I called on Monday, but they were not at home.'

'Ah,' said Johnson, with a merry twinkle of his eyes, 'it was a pity too that Jennie was out; and so would Jessie say when they returned. They were gone to Malvern, John; I heard from them. Unfortunate, upon my word, now, that it was. I am sorry for you.'

'Now, don't,' said Archer. '"Those who live in glass houses," you know. If it is six of one, it is half a dozen of the other.'

'Ah, well,' said Johnson, 'I suppose

some day or other we shall have to sink all our old bachelor ways, and become respectable members of society. I vote we both go up “for execution” on the same day, old fellow.’

‘With all my heart,’ said Archer, ‘if it suits the ladies; for Master Ned has an appointment in view, a three-hundred-a-year affair, Johnson; and if he takes it, as I suppose he will—as he is getting rather tired of the country, and it is a good thing—I must see to the estate myself, or get somebody to do so for me; and as you seem to have made up your mind to take my houskeeper away—I think you and Kate are about settled on that point, eh, Johnson?—why, the best thing I can do,’ said Archer, ‘as I cannot take yours—she is a dear good girl though; I wish I could have had her—’

‘She will never marry, John.’

‘Is to take her cousin, the next best to her, we’ll say, old man; but still, a

mutual interchange would have been so jolly !

‘Be thankful for what the gods have given you,’ replied Johnson. ‘Jessie is getting on the shady side of thirty, John, and Jennie is but twenty-one. Jessie, though a very good sister to me, and an excellent housekeeper, is old-maidish ; she loved some fool of a fellow just as she left school, and he married ; and she has not forgotten it, the stupid girl ; and so, sometimes, she gets mooney and moping. But I don’t think really, John, she will marry ; but as, when I get settled, she will be part of the year with us and the rest with aunt at Bristol, the change might rouse her. No, John,’ said Johnson, ‘you will do best as arranged. Jennie is a jolly nice girl, though she is my cousin ; and she will make you a good wife, old fellow.’

The Jennie in question was a Miss Jane Clare, whom Archer had met at the Rosary,

when she was on a visit to Miss Johnson, for the first time there, as she had then only recently left school; and as when she came again, and Miss Archer, who was then at home, met her, they recognised each other as former schoolfellows, at the first school they went to, it was agreed that, before Miss Clare went back to Bristol, she should come and stay a week or two at the Grange, with her and a lady friend—a Mrs. Best, a widow—who was on a visit there; Johnson and his sister Jessie, who could neither of them just then leave home entirely, promising to look in upon them most days.

Both Miss Archer and Miss Johnson were dark-haired girls, but Miss Clare had light sunny hair—the sort of hair, in fact, that Archer was so fond of. And as she was really a very nice sensible girl, with a fair face and a good figure, and a lady—as was to be expected, however, as she was Johnson's cousin—Archer, who had just

then given up all hopes of persuading Miss Johnson to change her mind, and so change her name, began to think whether, as he could not obtain the hand of the sister, he might not be more successful with the cousin.

And before she had been a week at the Grange he was pretty well satisfied, from what he had seen of her previously and from what he had seen of her there, that, as the saying is, he might 'go farther and fare worse.' So he took Johnson into his confidence; the result of which was that he had more frequent opportunities of getting side by side with her in their rambles around the neighbourhood.

And it was then spring-time, and the whole country was filled with the beauty of it; for the woods were bursting into blossom, and primroses were everywhere. Violets lent their fragrance, blue sky its brightness, and song-birds their cheerful-

ness. The young soft green upon the trees was grateful to the sight, and the ripple of the brooks—heard now the floods were gone—pleasing to the ear. Everything was bright, and all was beautiful. It was a very time for love and love-making, and Archer himself felt the force of it.

Sitting dreamily with a book under the cedars at the Grange, one bright blue morning, he turned as he heard a脚步声, and seeing that it was Miss Clare, he raised his hat as he rose and advanced across the lawn to meet her. That chance meeting sealed his fate; for, dressed as she was in the simplest and prettiest of spring costumes, with a bright bow at the neck, and her sunny hair loose under a hat and white feather, he thought as she came towards him that she looked most lovable.

Seeing that she had some little wicker affair in her hand, and was evidently on her way to feed the fowls, that lay about

there under the trees after they were let out in the morning, and which were already pets with her, he, meeting her, exclaimed:

‘Still thoughtful for your pets, I see, Miss Clare.’

‘At your expense it is though, Mr. Archer. Were I to stay here long, the debt,’ said she, ‘I fear, would be a heavy one. I must not feed them.’

‘To be discharged by your good words and smiles,’ said he, with meaning.

‘An easy payment, rendered cheerfully,’ she answered smilingly. ‘Your sister asked for you; she thought you had gone up to the Rosary; John, so she says, is coming here soon, with Jessie.’

‘I was out there with a book, Miss Clare, beneath the cedars.’

‘You are fond of reading?’

‘O, very fond; I dearly love it. And you,’ said Archer, ‘do you—you look as though you do—like reading too?’

‘O, dearly, same as you.’

‘And poetry, Miss Clare?’

‘O yes,’ said she, ‘I am very fond of poetry!’

‘And who is your favourite author?’
Archer asked.

‘O, Tennyson.’

‘Mine also; that is singular,’ said he.
‘We think alike. I am glad ’tis Tennyson.
It shows a mind, Miss Clare, a poetry of
soul, to love his works, which therefore
you possess.’

‘Now that indeed is flattery!’ said she.

‘We never flatter those we like, Miss
Clare.’

‘O Mr. Archer! There! Kate, I think,
is calling. Excuse me, will you not? I
will say I saw you.’

So Archer could not then commit himself.

But soon she came again. She had ‘left’
the basket, and had quite forgotten ‘all

those pretty fowls.' So then they went and fed them—both together.

And coming back he pointed out the views, and then the different peeps across the garden; and strolling on they came to the prettiest one of all, down by the Fernery, where, 'not to keep her standing,' they sat down, for, well shut in by trees, it was shady there; and as he said that Kate was coming there—at least he thought so—they did not hurry, as it was so pleasant; and time, with Tennyson the topic, went on unheeded.

And then he passed to flowers, and talked with her about them and their beauty; then touched on colour, form, art, pictures, books, and wandered off to hedgerow things and ferns, and the charms of young life budding in the woods.

'What say you to a stroll, Miss Clare,' said he, 'up through the woods, as it is so fine to-day, if Kate and Johnson join us?

We will look for primroses and violets. You will come back with an appetite for dinner, and—perhaps “a truelove.”

‘Now, John,’ cried Johnson, coming on them suddenly, ‘don’t drop your voice like that. O,’ said he, glancing at his cousin, ‘how somebody blushes! Never mind, Jennie, I won’t look at you. I have been through it, you know, and I know what it is. I am sorry for you both; I am indeed.’

‘Now, cousin,’ said she, ‘what a tease you are! We were merely resting just for a moment—now were we, Mr. Archer, while you pointed out the view from here?’

‘O yes, quite so,’ was the reply. ‘Don’t you rise, Miss Clare. In fact, old fellow,’ said he to Johnson, ‘you interrupted me before I had time to fully point it out to her; but, as I was saying, Miss Clare, where the trees dip so gracefully yonder to the water, and—’

‘Now, John, don’t!’ said Johnson; ‘don’t

you do violence to your feelings. The way the trees at the back here dip and screen you is far superior, and has far greater attractions for you both, I know, than the way they dip over yonder. O you young hypocrite!" said he to Jennie, passing his hand through the sunny hair that was on her neck, as he stood behind the seat, and raising her dimpled chin till her lips met his, and thus very nearly driving Archer wild at the sight of it. "How are you, you little gipsy? There, run away directly," said he, kissing her, "and get your things on; Kate and Jessie are going with us to the woods. They will think you have found "a truelove" if—"

"Be quiet, you tease! I don't know what it means," said she, "I am sure I don't; now do I, Mr. Archer?"

"I'll tell you," said Johnson, before Archer could reply, "as you are so very innocent. He means a primrose with six leaves

—six leaves or four. They call them, Jennie, round this country, “trueloves.”

‘Then that,’ said she, ‘explains your country phrase—I heard it, cousin!—“To seek your truelove ‘mongst the primroses.”’

‘Exactly, Jennie, though possibly there is a deeper meaning; but John will tell you. But there, don’t stay, you young blush-rose, but trot away and tell them we are waiting. And look here, Jennie,’ said he, ‘if Jessie has a headache, and would prefer remaining —mind, I say prefer—to keep Mrs. Best company, tell her we will excuse her, if she had rather not come; but you come, mind —you and Kate—if Jessie cannot; and look for “trueloves,”’ said Johnson, laughing as he pinched her cheek.

‘O yes, do; come to the woods with us, and seek you yours,’ said Archer, in a low tone, as she rose and, blushing, left them, and tripped across the lawn into the house, full of excuses for her absence from them.

But Kate and Jessie laughed, and went outside to call them in to lunch—Johnson and Archer. So Jennie, flushing, ran off to her room, and shaking down her curls, soon hid her blushes; and when she brushed her back-hair they were gone; but they came again as she went in to lunch, and met John Archer.

And after lunch they started to go up to the woods; Miss Johnson, as she 'had' a headache, remaining with Mrs. Best; so Miss Clare and Archer, and Johnson and Miss Archer, went there by themselves. But both Archer and Miss Clare seemed tired, for they did not anything like keep pace with their companions, but lagged behind sadly. The woods were tangled too, and their search was a long one.

Miss Clare, however, did find 'a true-love'—and so did Archer.

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